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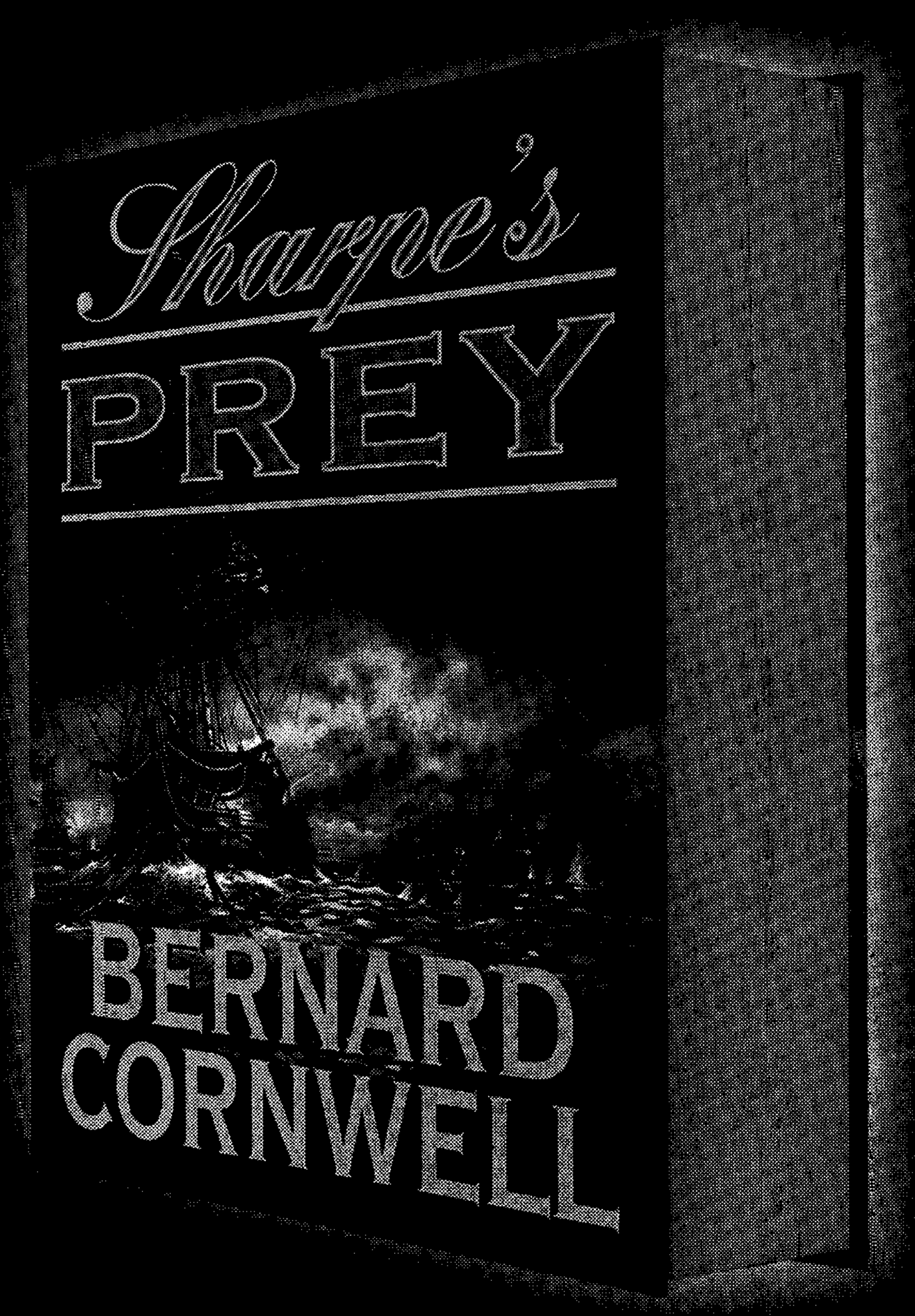

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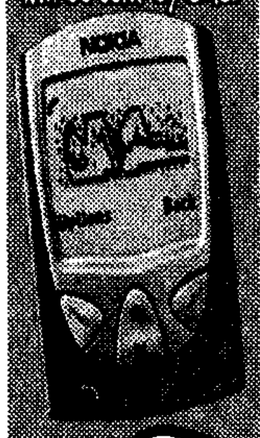

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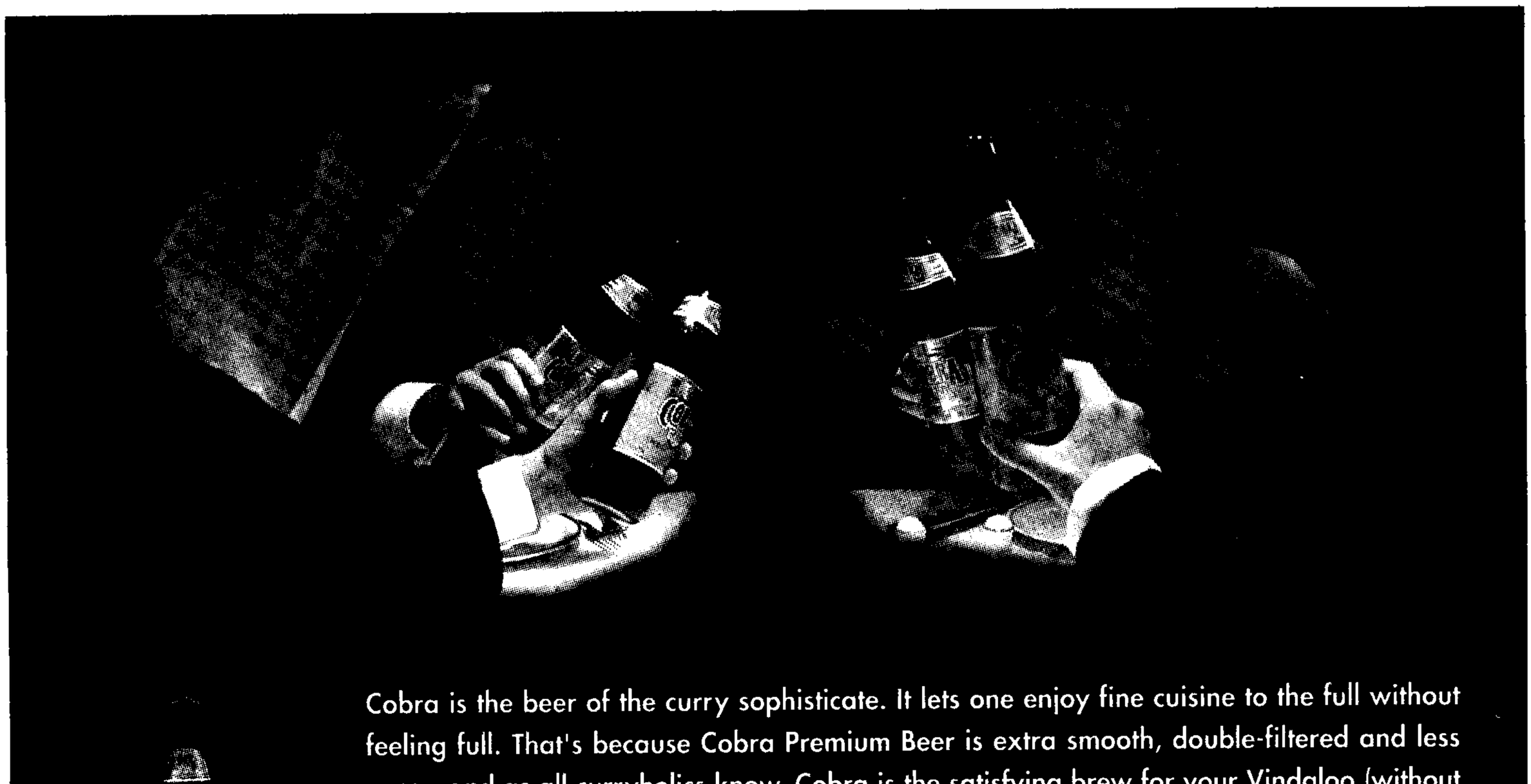

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Gnome

GNOME Newspapers (including the Daily Sexpress and the Daily Starbird) are delighted to welcome onto the board of directors the international photo-journalist Mr Jason Paparazzo.

Mr Paparazzo has established an enviable reputation throughout his long and distinguished career as the world's leading exponent of the art of taking out-of-focus pictures of minor celebrities on foreign beaches, preferably with their tops off.

There are those who complain that such pictures constitute an invasion of privacy — to which Mr Paparazzo rightly and robustly replies, "I know where you live. If you don't shut up, matey, we'll have a picture of your wife on the khazi on the front page of the Sexpress. Know what I mean?"

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ON OTHER PAGES

Crossroads Granny reveals all in Marbella hotspot 2

Hear'Say Star's Brother's Aunt like you've never seen her before in Eilat 3

Neasden FC's Striker's Wife bares all in Margate Beach Sizzler 94

NOTE TO READERS

The next issue, dated 20 April, will be on sale 24 hours later than usual, due to the Easter weekend break.

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- *Hackwatch on Fleet Street's poll-vaulters* **7**
- *Absolutely vaccinating: FMD Special* **9**
- *Hannibal Lecteur is back: See books* **26, 27**
- *Making a corporate killing: In the Back* **28, 29**
- *Like father like son: Slicker on Maxwell Jnr* **30**

THE *SUN*'s outburst warning the Queen not to interfere with the timing of the general election was all in vain. In the Battle of Blair's Ear, the Royalists won and the Roundheads lost.

Amazingly it was Brenda wot swung it, asking Blair infuriating questions from behind a tea cup with her tight-lipped and mocking smile that the prime minister cannot handle. Brenda had received a steady flow of letters in recent weeks asking her not to allow the prime minister to call a poll on 3 May when the foot and mouth crisis is still likely to be raging. Most of the letters were from individuals rather than pressure groups or desperate Tories, but they did prompt the palace to dust off the history books to check on Brenda's constitutional position.

The day after the palace began its researches, the *Sun*'s rant appeared, including the assertion that it is an "embarrassment" that the, er, head of state should have anything to do with the democratic process. Fearing a leak, an investigation was begun inside the palace, but no mole was uncovered. Instead Downing Street, routinely briefed about "themes" emerging from the royal postbag, has become the chief suspect. This became even more embarrassing when Blair eventually wobbled and had to brief the *Sun* that he was going to take Brenda's advice and delay the election after all.

PRINCE CHARLES, much hyped as a leader of some sort of foot-and-mouth task force, made the mistake of offering his services to the government shortly after disclosing that he had given £500,000 to support struggling farmers.

Downing Street, already castigated on all sides for its flat-footed response to the crisis, was incensed by St James's Palace's portrayal of Charles as some kind of horny-handed farmer-prince. Given the Rev Blair's own reluctance to pull on a pair of gumboots and tramp across muddy fields for the cameras, pictures of a Barboured prince meeting farmers instead of skiing in Klosters didn't go down well. The donation was the last straw.

So Charles's offer of help was rebuffed and accompanied by a stern warning to keep his nose out of politics. Charles, somewhat miffed at having to take second place to the charismatic environment minister Michael Meacher, is now planning a further substantial donation to farming charities. It is something of a mystery why the donations also made by the Queen, Queen Mother, Prince Philip and Princess Anne have not been made public – until now that is.

AS Tony Blair prevaricated over the election date, it was clear to most hacks that the vast majority of Labour MPs, and all the cabinet, were united in wanting to push ahead with a 3 May election, fearing that any delay could only assist William Hague.

Why bother to write anything different when a figure as senior as Clive Soley MP, chairman of the parliamentary Labour party, could boast on the *Today* programme that "Seventy percent of Labour MPs favour a May 3rd poll." But just how scientific was Soley's poll?

Opinion within the cabinet was split, with both Jack Straw and David Blunkett arguing for a delay; and it was split in the parliamentary Labour party too. It wasn't just those Labour MPs in rural constituencies, those such as West Country MPs Julia Drown and David Drew, whose offices were besieged by angry calls from constituents; other MPs from urban areas were having second thoughts too.

One Northern MP said that as the week went on, and the army was sent in to dig burial pits in Cumbria, that "opinion is now more divided" over the date. Others believed that Soley had been put up by Millbank – which *did* want a 3 May poll – to make his claim.

ONE of Tony Blair's former ministers, Lord Donoughue, has been criticised for not doing his duty as a director and vice-chairman of LBI, one of Robert Maxwell's companies. "Had he done so," the DTI report concludes, "he might have identified the abuse by Robert Maxwell of funds managed by LBI."

Some newspapers complain that Donoughue hasn't been punished for his deplorable conduct. True enough; but he is at least suffering some mild social ostracism. Last year he had to withdraw his application for membership of Brooks's Club after someone scrawled "not on your life" in the candidates' book and several prominent members threatened to resign if he was let in.

Now, even more gallingly, he has been snubbed by his old college, the London School of Economics. The LSE's chairman, millionaire Labour peer Lord Grabiner, recently proposed Donoughue as a member of the school's court of governors. He was backed by LSE director Anthony "Third Way" Giddens and fellow-governor Bob "Mori Poll" Worcester.

Alas! After reading Tom Bower's revelations about Donoughue in *Maxwell: The Final Verdict*, and learning that publication of the DTI report was imminent, other governors decided that it might not enhance the LSE's reputation to appoint a man who was about to be officially condemned for culpable negligence.

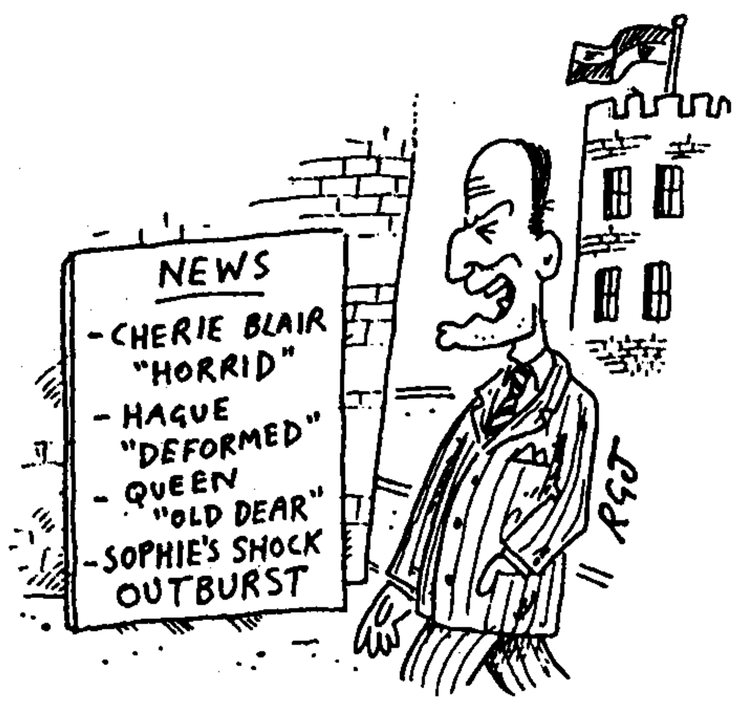
ON THE letters page, Robin Corbett MP rebukes us for suggesting that a "Blairite carpetbagger" might be brought in to succeed him as Labour candidate for Birmingham Erdington.

We are happy to stand corrected. As we went to press it was announced that the new Labour candidate for Birmingham Erdington will be Sion Simon – former Millbank apparatchik, now a Blairite pundit for the *News of the Screws* and *Daily Telegraph*, and resident of London NW1.

No carpetbags there, then: given Simon's taste for the good things in life, he'll need at least a dozen Louis Vuitton suitcases to accommodate his essential accoutrements for the election campaign, plus several large Fortnum's hampers.

JUST FANCY THAT!

IN January agriculture minister Nick Brown was encouraging farmers to insure themselves against "possible outbreaks of foot and mouth disease" (*Times*, 9 Jan) – an option that, according to a National Farmer's Union spokesman, "was not worthwhile" (*Eastern Daily Press*, 10 Jan).



"She's a credit to the Royal Family"

NEWS

AT THE gathering of Asian businessmen to celebrate John Major's first year in power in 1991 (see *Eye 1024*), Tory-supporting lawyer and friend of Keith Vaz, Sarosh Zaiwalla, was joined not only by two of the Hinduja brothers (Prakash and Gopichand) but also by one of India's foremost movie stars, Amitabh Bachchan, and his brother Ajitabh.

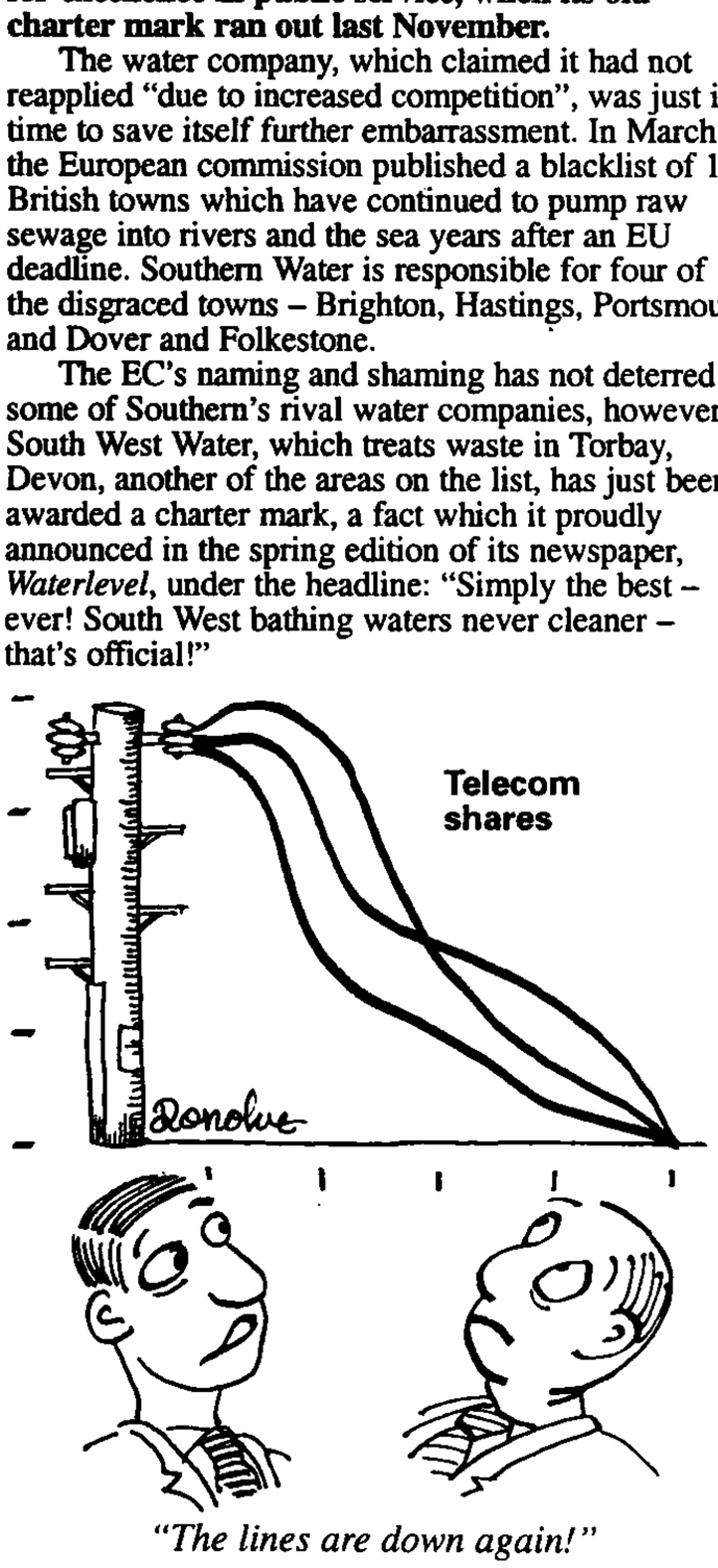
The two sets of brothers must have had plenty to talk about. Like the Hindujas, the Bachchans had become embroiled in the scandal surrounding the Bofors arms deal. In 1987, Amitabh Bachchan, a close friend of Rajiv and Sonia Ghandi, was forced to resign his parliamentary seat after it was alleged that his brother and manager Ajitabh was one of those who had received kickbacks from the Swedish arms company. Amitabh strongly denied the allegations, but stepped down nevertheless.

In 1992, Ajitabh Bachchan decided to clear his name. He brought a high court case for libel against the Indian newswire, *India Abroad Publications*, after reports it had filed appeared in two newspapers circulated in the UK repeating the allegation made by a Swedish newspaper, *Dagens Nyheter*, that Swiss authorities had frozen an account belonging to Bachchan to which money was transferred from a coded account into which commissions paid by Bofors were deposited. Ajitabh won £40,000 in damages from *India Abroad*, while *Dagens Nyheter* settled out of court. Bachchan was not so fortunate, however, when he tried to have the UK libel judgement enforced in the New York supreme court, where Judge Shirley Fingerhood deemed it unenforceable under the first amendment. And which lawyer represented Ajitabh Bachchan in New York? Step forward Sarosh Zaiwalla.

AFTER a barrage of criticism from people in the Folkestone area following its admission that a new £120m scheme will not guarantee an end to flooding from the sewers (see *Eyes passim*), Southern Water wisely decided not to reapply for the government's charter mark scheme, an award for excellence in public service, when its old charter mark ran out last November.

The water company, which claimed it had not reapplied "due to increased competition", was just in time to save itself further embarrassment. In March the European commission published a blacklist of 12 British towns which have continued to pump raw sewage into rivers and the sea years after an EU deadline. Southern Water is responsible for four of the disgraced towns – Brighton, Hastings, Portsmouth and Dover and Folkestone.

The EC's naming and shaming has not deterred some of Southern's rival water companies, however. South West Water, which treats waste in Torbay, Devon, another of the areas on the list, has just been awarded a charter mark, a fact which it proudly announced in the spring edition of its newspaper, *Waterlevel*, under the headline: "Simply the best – ever! South West bathing waters never cleaner – that's official!"



"The lines are down again!"

YET more wailing and gnashing of teeth at Westminster Abbey, thanks to the singular management style of the dean, Dr Wesley Carr (*Eyes passim*).

As dean of Bristol he sacked the organist and cathedral school head; as dean of Westminster he fired first the organist, and now the headmaster of the 37-pupil abbey choir school. This latest "resignation", however, broke the mould in that Carr fought to *prevent* it.

For months Dr Carr, as chairman of governors, robustly defended his headmaster against allegations of bullying and assured a succession of worried parents that they were alone in their concerns. The press was told that there had been an inquiry into an "isolated incident" connected with "the headmaster's criticism of a pupil"; his leadership of the school was strongly endorsed.

Following four pupil withdrawals, yet more complaints and a recruitment crisis, Carr was finally persuaded that the head, Roger Overend, had to go. This was reinforced by a long-awaited Westminster council social services report which concluded that there had been a history of oppressive discipline; it also made clear that parents' concerns had been put to the dean "at earlier times".

A discreet and expensive deal was formulated; Carr announced that "for personal reasons", and to the governors' regret, Mr Overend had resigned and an acting head had been recruited. The abbey, and the parents, hoped the school was on the mend at last.

On his arrival new head John Curtis arranged a meeting to introduce himself to parents. Among their number was one R. Overend – in his capacity as step-father to two choristers. Choosing his moment, he announced to the assembled company that he had not resigned, he had been sacked, and pointed a finger at those of his supposed tormentors still remaining among the parents.

MANAGERS at the Public Records Office in Kew have devised a clever money-saving idea: they are using prisoners in British jails to input on to computer the information from the 1901 census.

The prisoners' work has been checked, however, and they have been found to be rewriting history. All references to prison wardens in 1901 have been changed to "bastards".

Officials are now using cheap labour in India to correct the errors.

Street of Shame

"GUILTY... but why no punishment?" Thus the front page of last Saturday's *Mirror*, spluttering with righteous indignation at the DTI report into Robert Maxwell's chicanery.

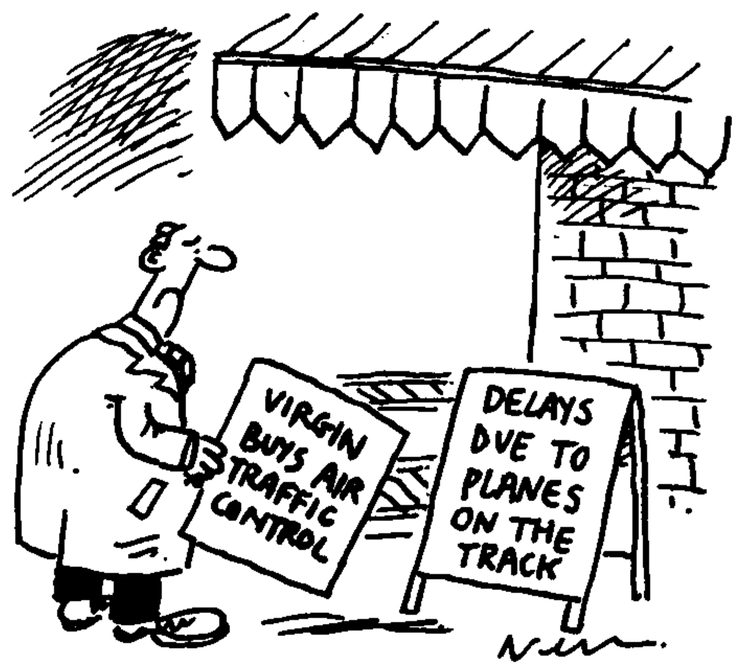
Other headlines in the paper's extensive coverage were equally scathing: "Men Who Betrayed the *Mirror*... Greed and Lies of Maxwell's Cronies... List of Shame." An editorial demanded: "Act Now to Stop More Maxwells."

Fine sentiments. But some *Mirror* hacks could hardly contain their mirth at all this moralising – coming as it does from a newspaper whose editor is under investigation by the DTI, and whose directors have apparently condoned share-ramping and other financial skulduggery.

Why no punishment indeed? And will the DTI's inquiry into the "greed" and "betrayal" of Piers Moron and his "cronies" take as long to surface as the Maxwell report?

HACKS at the *Mirror* are meanwhile alarmed at Piers' deteriorating mental condition. One sign of lost marbles is his hiring of two refugees from Mohamed Fayed's *Punch* magazine, James Steen and Dominic Midgley, to write a pisspoor diary column called "The Scurra" – thus repaying the favour done when Fayed hired two disgraced *Mirror* hacks, Messrs Hipwell and Bhoyrul, and confirming our report in the last *Eye* about the Moron-Fayed network.

In their very first week Steen and Midgley led



with the news that millionaire quiz-winner Judith Keppel had split up with her boyfriend.

Alas! The piece was not quite as accurate as it might have been. The *Mirror* had to run a correction the next day, and then further mollified Keppel by printing a long, gushing interview ("It is four months since glamorous granny Judith Keppel became Britain's most famous millionaire – and life could not be sweeter.")

Despite the embarrassment of Scurra and the even more inaccurate malice of the vapid 3am girls, Piers still gets furious at mistakes in other papers. Further evidence of his somewhat fragile grip on reality emerged last week when the *Grauniad*'s media website ran a brief story suggesting that the next TV critic of the *Daily Mirror* might be Jane Goldman (aka Mrs Jonathan Ross). Within minutes the young *Grauniad* hackette responsible for the piece, who had never met Moron in her life, received the following emailed tirade:

"Jessica, luv, I am obviously not getting through to you very well. Rusbridger might not know what his arse and elbow are doing in the newsroom when it comes to hiring and firing due to the 'collegiate' atmosphere of your tawdry little rag – but I take more of a Corleone view. If someone gets 'whacked' or 'made' then I clear it. And I am telling you, for the last time, that Jane Goldman has never and will never been considered for the job... Just remove the fucking thing from the website before you make yourself look even more stupid than I am beginning to suspect you might be. Then just sit there quietly drinking your Ethiopian expresso and munching your lentil sandwich and hold your head in disgusted shame. Which is, I believe, a preferred mode of expression for you these days."

We can only hope that a week's bed-rest restores some vestige of sanity to his poor tormented brain.

AT THE British Press Awards two weeks ago, there was no doubt about the winner of the coveted Most Completely Pissed Award, which went, yet again, to *Mirror* Editor, Piers Morgan.

Piers appeared to be drunk before the dinner had even started. After hurling a few threats at Lord Gnome's representative ("You're dead!") he then invited *Grauniad* editor Alan Rusbridger to join him in kidnapping *Sun* editor David Yelland, dragging him off to a private suite at the hotel and gang-banging him.

Anal rape seems to be something of an obsession for Moron at the moment. He confided that by this time next year he expects to be in Ford open jail, but will continue editing the *Mirror* from inside. "And I'm going to have the greatest scoop of all time! When I get buggered by the other inmates I'll put it on the front page! And readers will be able to ring a premium-rate phone number to hear my screams as I take it up the arse!" Charming.

WAPPING executives at the British Press Awards dinner were delighted when *Sun* hack John Kay was named as Reporter of the Year. But their rejoicing was cut short when host Michael Parkinson read out the citation, which praised Kay's talent for producing "knock 'em dead stories".

As everyone in the room knew – except Parky, apparently – Kay is extremely sensitive to any such phrase as "knock 'em dead": back in the late 1970s he had to take several years' leave of absence from the *Sun* after being convicted of killing his wife.

VANESS Feltz's "celebrity column" in *OK! Daily Express* started too recently to qualify for the recent British Press Awards. But she should be a dead cert next year for the Biggest Gobstopping Humbug prize.

On her page last week, Feltz rebuked Nicole Kidman for taking up parachuting. "Someone needs to tell Ms Kidman that life, especially with two children reeling from the effects of her recently shattered marriage, should not be spent lurching from one thrill-seeking high to another." Kidman should at home "establishing a secure and safe life for her little ones".

Just like Vanessa, of course, who coped with her husband's desertion by pumping adrenaline in the gym, attending every party and first night in London, and having a torrid (and very public) affair with her personal trainer.

Those who recall Vanessa's ceaseless wails about her own divorce may also have been surprised to find her gloating over the divorce of Ellen Fein, "who made us all feel woefully inadequate when she published *The Rules*" and who had "boasted of her happy marriage" (just as Feltz used to). Vanessa's verdict on Fein's shattered love-life? "There is justice in the world."

Finally, Vanessa was delighted to learn that Queen Cleopatra was short, dumpy and rather plain. "Proof positive of what we all knew deep down anyway: attractiveness has nothing much to do with being a size 10 Barbie doll." Can this be the same person who has spent all year lucratively promoting her diet books and videos to anxious punters who believe that men don't fancy overweight women?

WILLIAM HAGUE's spin-doctor Amanda Platell came in for a spectacular mauling in the *Times* two weeks ago.

There was little new in the feature, which merely echoed a piece published in the *Eye* last December revealing that many senior Tories (and not just the Portillistas) fear that she isn't up to the job. What was more significant was its timing and its prominence.

Friends of Platell have already worked out a conspiracy theory to explain why the *Times* wishes to sabotage her. The piece was written by Michael Gove, biographer of Michael Portillo and close associate of anti-Hague Tories. Meanwhile, *Times* editor Peter Stothard and columnist Mary Anne Sieghart are both close to Tony Blair and Alastair Campbell. Might Campbell have encouraged the paper to run a piece undermining Platell? And could this have anything to do with the fact that Campbell was sacked as Mirror Group political editor in the early 1990s by a *Mirror* executive called... Amanda Platell?

Times hands suspect the attack may have played well with their proprietor, too. After Murdoch sacked Platell's mentor David "Rommel" Montgomery from *Today*, Amanda (who was then deputy editor) still harboured big ambitions at News International. Alas, the Digger's opinion of Platell did not match her own. "She can talk the talk," he told a colleague, explaining why she'd never be an editor, "but I don't think she can walk the walk."

THE gruesome tale of a fire in the dormitory of a Kenyan boarding school which killed 58 boys was illustrated in early editions of the *Daily Telegraph* on 27 March by a large photograph captioned: "Disaster area: charred roof timbers lie between the metal bunks of the dormitory at a Kenyan boarding school."

What was depicted in the picture, however, was clearly not charred roof timbers, but charred bodies complete with visible skulls. When one reader phoned the paper to point this out he was informed by "Patsy" on the news desk that: "I am told from on high that it is charred timber."

Despite this assurance the wording of the caption was changed in subsequent editions of the *Terrorgraph* to: "Disaster area: an official inspects the horrific aftermath of the dormitory blaze at a Kenyan boarding school." Reuters, which took the photograph, has told the *Eye* that the charred remains are indeed bodies. Would the *Terrorgraph* had taken more care if the boarding school had been, say, Eton?

IN *Eye* 1023 we mentioned a "paint-stripping phone call" from Sue Mott of the *Daily Telegraph* to Alison Kirvan of *The Times*.

We have now been told that no such phone call took place. Many apologies.

A REMARKABLE scoop for *Observer* hackette Amelia "Nice But Dim" Hill. Writing about the case of Mike O'Brien, who spent 10 years in jail for a murder he didn't commit, she reveals that in prison he met other "innocent men" such as "Carl Bridgewater, Vincent Hickey and Michael Shirley..." No mean feat, given that Carl Bridgewater was the newsboy for whose murder Hickey was wrongly convicted.

Such gaffes are, alas, par for the course with Ms Nice But Dim. Earlier this year she reported that children "as young as 6" were being brought from Africa and the Far East into Britain, where they were sold into prostitution. Although she conspicuously failed to find any such six-year-olds, she did manage to interview some older Vietnamese prostitutes who had come here after a spell in France.

Asked where she lived in France, one of the girls started to reply: "J'habite..." Back at the office, Hill asked the *Observer* librarians where the French town J'Habite was. "I've been looking at a map," the puzzled hackette sighed, "but I can't find it anywhere."

"Duty is a two-edged sword, Charlotte, and, as an accountant, my first duty is to my clients"

THE cares of office are taking their toll on Adam Leigh of the *Independent*, who also happens to be the nephew of the paper's editor Simon Kelner. Only a few months after Uncle Simon promoted him to be news editor, Leigh has sent out a heart-rending *cri de coeur* to his hacks.

"Dear all – There is almost total absence of story ideas coming from the newsroom at the moment, meaning that every day is turning into a nightmare for the newsdesk. It is not acceptable for you as national newspaper journalists to just sit at your desks waiting for something to happen and not offering anything of a decent quality to put in the paper...

"Each week we are encountering the same disinterest and complacency. I am simply not prepared to sit here day after day trying to create a newspaper from thin air. I would welcome your comments."

WHEN the relationship between Sir Paul McCartney and model Heather Mills became public last year, *Sunday Mirror* columnist Carole Malone had nothing but harsh words for the former Beatle.

"I suppose that, having listened as Paul told us about Linda being his soulmate, the love of his life and about how they'd only spent three nights apart in 30 years, I'm disappointed that just 18 months after her death he meets a beautiful blonde at a charity event and – hey presto – there's an instant attraction."

However, there is one rule for ageing pop stars and models and another for journalists and domestic goddesses. "If Nigella found some comfort, good luck to her," writes Glenda Malone of the relationship between Nigella Lawson and advertising 'guru' Charles Saatchi, said to have commenced before the death of Lawson's husband, John Diamond. "Who are we to judge?" asks Glenda. Who indeed?

HACKWATCH

Poll Vaults

"A May poll has long been expected, but Mr Blair fears an economic slump in the United States could have a knock-on effect in Britain. He has ordered party managers to be ready for a March poll when he will call on voters for a fresh mandate." — Chris McLaughlin, *Sunday Mirror*, 7 January 2001.

"The eyes of political commentators from all of Britain's media will be on Swansea in March. For it has been confirmed that both the Welsh Conservatives and Wales Labour Party will hold their conferences in the city's Brangwyn Hall. It is possible that during either conference in March, Tony Blair will announce the general election date." — Brian Walters, *South Wales Evening Post*, 9 January.

"Why I believe Mr Blair will go to the electorate in April, not May." — Michael Brown, *Independent*, 17 January.

"Winter warmers for the elderly and the NHS were signalled by Tony Blair last night as speculation swept Westminster that a general election could be held as early as 5 April." — "Exclusive" by Patrick O'Flynn and Kirsty Walker, *Daily Express*, 15 February.

"Tony Blair is coming under intense pressure from Labour officials, ministers and MPs to seize on Tory disarray and call a general election on 5 April. The prime minister is being urged by colleagues to use the booming economy and Labour's big opinion poll lead to deliver a second term." — Paul Waugh and Andrew Grice, *Independent*, 17 February.

"William Hague was staring into the abyss last night after polls showed confidence in the Tories has slumped to its lowest for a year. Labour's lead is as big as it was before its 1997 landslide election victory – increasing speculation that Tony Blair will call an early general election on 5 April." — Oonagh Blackman, *Daily Mirror*, 22 February.

"William Hague [has] put the Tory party on alert for an early general election on 5 April... Mr Hague, who read the latest manifesto draft over the weekend, has told staff that he believes Tony Blair will no longer wait for the most likely election date of 3 May." — James Landale, the *Times*, 26 February.

"A note of exaggeration has been heard in some reporting... Preposterous suggestions have been made, for example, that the general election should be deferred." — *Guardian* editorial, 28 February.

"Election day will be 3 May – exactly four years after Tony Blair's landslide 1997 victory, the *Sun* can reveal." — "Exclusive" by George Pascoe-Watson, *Sun*, 9 March.

"The general election WILL be held on 3 May despite opposition from some farmers, the *Sun* can reveal today. Tony Blair is resisting rural calls to postpone the big vote until the foot-and-mouth crisis is over. And the decision proves the *Sun*'s stories pinpointing a 3 May polling day have been spot on." — Trevor Kavanagh, *Sun*, 20 March.

"SORRY, WE'RE CLOSED... This is the message Britain will send to the world if the 3 May election is put off... If [Blair] DOES postpone he knows that decision will worsen the crisis... Blair must do all he can to avoid putting up the shutters and closing Britain down. That is what a cancelled election would mean. Let us hope we can avoid such a course of action. Not for the good of Labour. But for the good of Britain." — *Sun* editorial, 26 March.

"Fools, fools, fools that we were. Fools all of us who ever imagined that Tony Blair could do the decent thing. My friends, I have news. There will, beyond the teensiest whisper of a soupcon of a shadow of a doubt, be a general election on 3 May... Blair will go to the country when the country is least ready for him, and the announcement will be either today, or on Monday. If that man is not in Windsor by early next week, kissing hands and asking for a dissolution, then I will eat my hat garnished with bacon from Heddon-on-the-Wall." — Boris Johnson, *Daily Telegraph*, 29 March.

"*SUN* EXCLUSIVE: ELECTION OFF. Now it's 7 June as Blair puts country before party." — Trevor Kavanagh, *Sun*, 31 March.

"This is the action of a courageous prime minister... There will be few who fail to agree that Tony Blair has shown real guts. To go on 3 May was the EASY OPTION." — *Sun* editorial, 31 March.

WHEN Blair made his decision about the election he clearly didn't listen to the Labour Party. So, apart from Brenda, *(see p. 5)* **who does he listen to? First of all, there is the increasingly regal Anji Hunter (now cast as Elizabeth I to political secretary Sally Morgan's Mary Queen of Scots). Then there is Mandy, who is back on his mobile and, thirdly, there is his new friend Sean Woodward.**

In times of crisis Blair follows his overriding instinct: to closet himself with the Machiavellians in his entourage.

The rule of plausible deniability requires Mandy to be kept at a physical distance, so Blair has been spending more time with Woodward. After producing Esther Rantzen's *That's Life* at the BBC, spin-doctoring for the Tories in the 1992 election and a spell as a middle-ranking frontbench spokesman in Hague's team before defecting to Labour, Woodward feels he has "one last big job" in him.

This could be, say, as ambassador to Washington, as a big cheese at the European Commission or maybe even something in the cabinet. It all rather depends on whether he can win a parliamentary seat. A few weeks' delay should sort that out. Woodward has the advantage over Mandy as a favoured courtier in that his big houses are already all paid for by his Sainsbury wife.

COMETH the crisis, cometh the buck-passing... While Tony Blair spent the first three weeks of the foot and mouth crisis poring over general election plans, agriculture minister Nick Brown spent his time in tense meetings with stricken farmers while putting into immediate action half-baked plans drawn up by MAFF civil servants.

With Whitehall alive with rumours that Brown offered his resignation to Blair last week (it was refused), it has become increasingly obvious that MAFF has become the whipping boy. At some stage, however, someone may ask the obvious question: where did the decision lie over sending in the army to deal with diseased sheep – with MAFF or the prime minister? And if the answer is the latter – which it is – why did he take so long about it?

TORY attempts to attack Labour over sleaze continue to rebound – not least when Conservative transport spokesman Bernard Jenkin accused his counterpart John Prescott of a "clear conflict of interest" for trying to bring lobbyist and friend Michael Craven into the Millbank election unit.

Craven also represents Metronet, the consortium that is bidding for the London underground. And as Jenkin told the *Independent*: "John Prescott has severely compromised himself in his conduct of these bids for the tube public-private partnership."

But does Jenkin know who Metronet is? The consortium is led by former long-term Tory party donor Balfour Beatty, whose chairman is none other than the Tory lord Viscount Weir. Another consortium member is the engineering firm WS Atkins. The same WS Atkins which pays Tory MP Archie Hamilton, the former junior defence minister, £5,001 to £10,000 a year as a "consultant".

Another tube consortium is home to engineers Amey and Jarvis. Amey has former Tory education secretary John Patten on the board, and Jarvis has found room on its board for failed Tory mayoral candidate Steve Norris.

So when Jenkin cries "foul" about Labour cosying up to tube privatisers, what he probably means is: "Hey – that's our job."

IN a similar vein, Tory environment spokesman Damian Green claims he was shocked by the revelation that a key Labour donor, Paul Adamson, had been lobbying for the chemical industry at the European parliament.

Adamson's lobbying firm has been working for the chemicals industry in resisting restrictions on phthalates, chemicals used in PVC toys that environmentalists fear may harm children's development. Green raged: "This is another example of murky links between Labour donors and government policy. There should be a complete division between policy-making and party fundraising and the government has a lot of questions to answer about its links with lobbyists on this sensitive subject."

Weirdly Green seems unaware that it is his fellow Tory politicians who are leading the fight to keep Phthalates from being restricted. Tory East Midlands MEP Richard Helmer leads the pro-phthalate lobby, declaring that "the recent ban on phthalates in toys was not justified by any adverse health evidence, and will arguably increase risks by forcing the use of alternative plasticisers, which may be more dangerous".

Helmer put amendments to the European parliament to stop restrictions of phthalates, and included the fantastically complicated chemical formulae for phthalates in his motions. Helmer cheerfully and openly admitted that he had received the information and other help form industry lobbyists – like the lobbyists Damian Green is so keen to condemn.

Perhaps Green would also like to speak to his fellow MP Jacqui Lait, a one-time PPS to William Hague. Lait was formerly parliamentary consultant to the Chemical Industries Association. Paul Adamson said that one of his two phthalate-related lobbying contracts was for the same Chemical Industries Association, which has long opposed restrictions on these chemicals.

"Of course, I like to think of myself as Conservative with a small 'c'."

IF "new" Labour really wants to grapple with issues like unemployment and poor business performance in its second term, it will need good quality research.

Fortunately, trade and industry secretary Stephen Byers has found an excellent new chair for the Economic and Social Research Council, the UK's principle funding body for social science research.

She is Frances Cairncross – an expert on joblessness and low profitability who sits on the board (as a non-executive) of the building society that became a pisspoor bank. At the end of November the Alliance announced it would cut 1,500 of its 8,000 workforce by the end of 2003. This didn't satisfy opinion in the City, which is irritated by the contrast between the Alliance, where profits are dropping, and every other major bank where they are zooming up.

JUST FANCY THAT!

"Many newspapers describe her as Blair's 'gatekeeper', but this is wrong." — Profile of Anji Hunter by Michael Prescott, *Sunday Times*, 1 April.

"Philip Gould's sentiments were echoed by Anji Hunter, Blair's old friend and gatekeeper..." — Report on election delay by Michael Prescott, *Sunday Times*, 1 April.

Liberty

WHAT THE PAPERS SAY

Blair seemed nettled by Hague's mention of the vaccination option. He accused him of jumping on a bandwagon "with any particular problem there is in the country". Opposition leaders tend to do this, but Blair, sounding uncannily like his Vicar of St Alban's *alter ego* in *Private Eye*, pouted "It does not help, frankly".

Matthew Parris, The Times

AMONG the few measures introduced by home secretary Jack Straw that have given any comfort to liberals are the provisions in the 1998 crime and disorder act regarding racist violence and harassment.

The act was intended to make it easier to prosecute racists, for example, who subject immigrant families to sustained persecution in their homes. It is unlikely that those who framed it considered its potential usefulness in helping Tony Blair lick George "Dubya" Bush's ass, but that is precisely the use to which the act is now being put.

On 25 April at Harrogate magistrates' court, one Lindis Percy faces charges of using "abusive or insulting or disorderly behaviour" motivated by hostility towards an ethnic group, contrary to section 31 of the C&D act.

Had Ms Percy been a member of the British National Party and spat upon Muslims attending a mosque, she would have been in the clear, as according to Mr Justice Tucker in the high court in 1998, such behaviour does not come under the scope of race relations legislation because Muslims are not an "ethnic group" as such.

Ms Percy, however, is not a neo-Nazi but a 59-year-old anti-nuclear protester who regularly demonstrates outside US bases, waving an American flag bearing the words "Stop Star Wars" and a placard with the provocative slogan "George W Bush? Oh dear!"

On 13 December last year she was arrested for "obstructing the highway" outside the Menwith Hill US tracking station on the moors near Harrogate, North Yorkshire, where radar equipment vital to Dubya's crazed "star wars" missile defence system is already being installed. After studying video footage which allegedly showed Ms Percy trailing the stars and stripes on the ground, the crown prosecution service added two "racial harassment" charges on the grounds that American servicemen entering or leaving the case were "likely to be caused harassment alarm or distress thereby".

How reassuring to find the British authorities so determined to stamp out racism wherever it rears its ugly head!

E-mail: herefordconservativeass@tory.org

Hereford Conservative Association

Earlier Stories

- Tories reveal rubbish policies (ePolitix) Tuesday March 20, 07:45 AM

Yahoo website

LABOUR'S IT GIRLS

THE long-awaited outcome of the judicial review into the IR35 tax, brought by the Professional Contractors Group (PCG), a body of some 12,000 people affected by the tax which penalises contractors who operate as one-man service companies (see *Eye 1024*), was heard at the high court on Monday 2 April.

Mr Justice Burton criticised the Inland Revenue's existing tests for the tax, describing these as inappropriate, unclear, inflexible, inaccurate and unhelpful, and laid down new guidelines, while leaving IR35 itself intact. The main proponent of IR35 has been the paymaster-general Dawn Primarolo, or Dim Prawn as she has become known in the contractor community; but the department of trade and industry (DTI) minister for small business and e-commerce, Patricia Hewitt, has also taken a keen interest in the issue.

Following a report in *Computer* magazine warning that 18 percent of contractors could leave the country as a result of IR35, Hewitt raised concerns with the treasury early last year. Since then, however, she has become something of a U-turn minister. Shortly before Christmas she told a DTI select committee hearing that she had heard of no small businesses affected by a contractor exodus, and claimed that only tens of contractors have moved abroad as a result of IR35.

This is strongly disputed by the PCG which argues: "Most independent surveys suggest that around 20-25 percent of the UK's most skilled IT experts have left, will not return, or are intending to take their skills overseas to more favourable tax regimes." The e-minister is also a great supporter of "new" Labour's fast-track visa scheme which has made it easier for the big IT companies, such as her former employer Andersen Consulting (*shurely "Accenture"? Ed.*) to recruit cheaper overseas workers. Last year India was at the top of the list of countries supplying IT professionals to the UK under this system, with 11,474 workers bypassing the usual rules requiring a job to be advertised and remain unfilled before it can be given to a foreign national.

In October 2000 Hewitt spent a week in India promoting information technology links between the two countries. Her boss, trade secretary Stephen Byers, paid a second visit to India in January to promote "trade partnerships" and to open a new Marconi computer factory in Delhi. In his opening speech he declared that India was set to become "one of the most exciting knowledge-driven economies of the 21st century", a statement which rang with bitter irony in the ears of British contractors affected by IR35. In the same week Hewitt visited China and Japan to promote Britain as "the partner of choice for trade and investment in e-commerce and the new technologies".

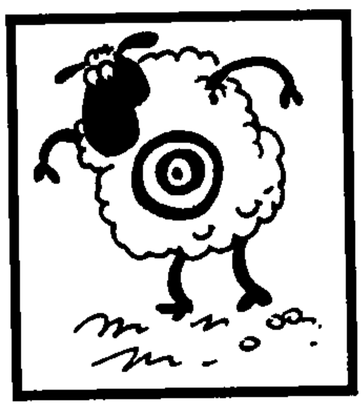
While the recent high court judgment has improved the situation for contractors, the IR35 tax remains in place together with the fast-track visa scheme. Is there any logic behind the solution to the skills shortage in IT workers proposed by our "joined-up government" – courting overseas partners while driving home-grown IT specialists out of business, or out of the country?

QUOTE OF THE WEEK

OVERHEARD in the Commons tearoom, a Midlands MP in conversation with a colleague.

"Why don't they turn them [burning cattle] round the other way so that their legs don't stick up in the air? It wouldn't look 'alf as bad."

'Backbiter'



DOWN ON THE FARM

Foot and Mouth Special

IF THE Chief Jellybaby (aka Tony Blair) thinks that, by postponing his election for a month, he can go to the country posing as the man who brought foot and mouth disease (FMD) under control, he has another think coming.

All the indications are that, by June, the epidemic will be far more serious than it is already, because by then it may be running riot through the dairy herd. As we face the drying up of our national milk supplies, even hardened urban "new" Labourites may realise it was not such a brilliant idea just to wish all those horrid farmers would shut up and disappear.

Mr Blair's one real hope of bringing this disaster under control would have been to do what should have been done in early March, when it first became clear that the mass-slaughter policy was failing to stop the spread of the disease. All stops should then have been pulled out to organise a massive vaccination programme of cattle, and allow sheep just to suffer a few days' discomfort from which the vast majority would soon naturally recover.

But what even the pro-vaccination lobby has not grasped is just how little of the relevant vaccines would actually be available for Britain to use. One investigator way ahead of the pack on this is John Warmerdam, a Dutchman who keeps sheep in Argyll. When he looked into the position on vaccine stocks, what he discovered was far more alarming than anyone has yet realised.

Only four sites in Europe are permitted to manufacture vaccines, under strict rules designed to prevent escape of the live FMD virus from laboratories. These are the Lelystad Institute in Holland; Bayer at Leverkusen in Germany; and two in Britain: the Animal Health Institute at Pirbright; and a nearby lab owned by the French company Merial. Only five million doses of the relevant Merian strain are in stock, and these are normally kept in "half-product" state, that is frozen in liquid nitrogen, needing several days to be made usable. To make more vaccine takes several weeks. Two million doses are held for the Dutch government at Lelystad, which also manufactures vaccine for commercial use. It is distributed by Intervet, which currently holds 1.25 million further doses. But in an emergency this can be legally impounded for use in Holland. Similarly Bayer holds 1.1 million doses for the German government, while France probably has access to one million doses, not least through Merial in Pirbright.

Far less well-placed is Britain, which only manufactures vaccine at Pirbright for the EU and an international vaccine bank. And as merely one member of the consortium, the UK only has direct call on 200,000 doses. Even though Britain might be allowed use of another 1 million, this would be nothing like enough to vaccinate all the country's 11 million cattle.

So if even at this late stage the British government were to opt for vaccination, it would take months to commission sufficient supplies (the vaccines must be grown on cancer cells taken from rats). The decision should have been taken weeks ago, right at the start of the FMD outbreak.

The Maffia and the NFU may have been suicidally ignorant in objecting to vaccination, based on their complete failure to grasp modern vaccine science. But even if they had not been trapped in such a Luddite mindset, the lack of forward planning by successive British governments means we would not have had the resources to mount a proper vaccination strategy anyway.

And it is Mr Blair who must now live with the consequences.

'E.N. Muckspreader'

AT THE start of the foot and mouth crisis the ministry of agriculture contacted everyone it knew with the expertise to kill livestock humanely. This included a number of employees of British hunts, who run a "fallen stock" service — disposing of elderly or wounded horses and farm animals — as part of their daily business.

On 6 March an article appeared in the *Daily Telegraph* by environment editor Charles Clover, under the heading: "Ministry enlists hunt staff for slaughter". Clover highlighted the irony of the measure being taken so soon after ministers had voted to ban hunting.

Following the newspaper story the huntsmen's phones went strangely quiet. The hunting associations wrote to agriculture minister Joyce Quinn on 20 March, formally offering the services of their staff, but to date have received no reply. At the end of last month some hunt employees were drafted in to help with the mass cull in Cumbria, but this was on the initiative of the army and the Tory MP for Penrith, David Maclean, rather than MAFF. Surely MAFF's reluctance to use readily available expert labour has nothing to do with the voting record of the secretary of state Nick Brown and agriculture ministers Joyce Quinn and Elliot Morley who have all voted to ban hunting with dogs?

● SHORTLY after the announcement by the UK's biggest cattle-breeding group and farming consultancy, Genus, that it was cutting salaries by 20 percent as a result of the foot and mouth crisis, its staff were seconded by MAFF to help dispose of animal carcasses.

Some Genus employees are not entirely happy that while MAFF is paying the company £120 per worker per day for their services, they remain on their newly reduced wage. Although there can be little doubt that the crisis has adversely affected a company which depends on artificial inseminators travelling from farm to farm for a large part of its trade, Genus was already in trouble long before the first foot and mouth outbreak, when it received a profits warning last November following trouble in its veterinary supplies arm, Genusxpress.

Genus was formed five years ago as a spin off from the old Milk Marketing Board when the government handed out free shares in the company to the UK's 28,000 dairy farmers. Since then it has undergone massive diversification into consultancy and veterinary products, under the aegis of chief executive Richard Wood, who joined Genus in 1997 after a 20-year career in the pharmaceuticals industry, working for ICI.

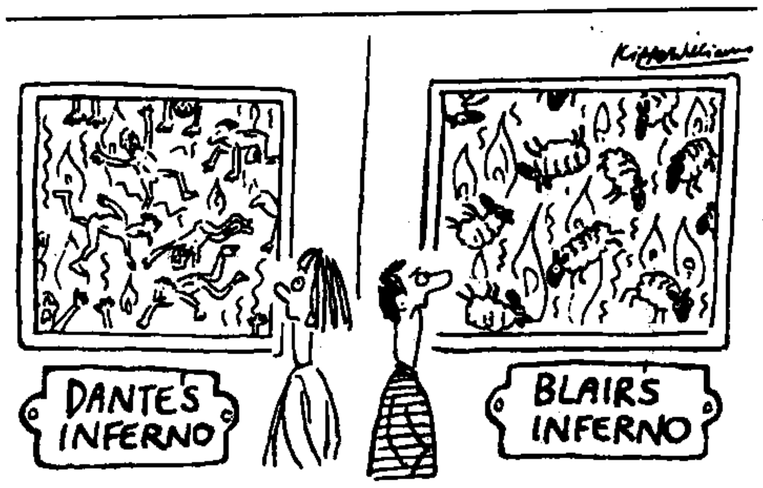
In 1999 Dick "Dead" Wood, so called for his ruthless cutting of costs and "improvement" of profit margins, oversaw the hostile takeover of a veterinary distribution company, VDC, which was to become Genusxpress. Insiders claim that his lack of grounding in the cattle breeding business blinded Wood to the fact that vets hate artificial insemination (AI) technicians with a passion, believing that AI is a procedure only they should be allowed to undertake, thus damaging the new acquisition from the outset. Wood's answer at the time of the profit warning was to blame the Genusxpress management, who were hastily replaced.

Following the news of the salary cuts on 8 March, Genus's share price dropped by 10p to 95p, while in November the profits warning saw the share price fall 15p to 97.5p. The company claims that the 20 percent cut is subject to review, but there is no guarantee that wages will go up again. Still, the money saved as the financial year draws to a close might just save Genus's bacon.

● FOOTPATHS, bridleways, downland and fells are shut off to walkers, bikers and riders. Archaeologists have had to down tools on excavation sites, school field trips have been axed. Foot and mouth has placed the countryside out of bounds to all... er, except those involved in GM crop trials.

Friends of the Earth has discovered that only those farms where the disease is confirmed will be closed to GM scientists. But even in infected areas biotech staff who monitor both crops and wildlife on GM sites will be able to travel between the ever growing number of farms involved in the trials — now up to 115 — springing up all over the country.

Why the government is insisting on helping the biotech industries and has not called a halt to further trials during the current crisis remains a mystery, given that the public has little more regard for GM food than they do for foot and mouth.



TV

Reggie Kray — The Final Word (BBC1)
Son Of God (BBC1)

A BIG week for deities on BBC1. There was an attempt for Lent to offer the latest thinking on JC but, before that, it was the turn of RK, the gangster god, one of the unholy East End trinity of the Kray Brothers.

Reggie Kray – The Final Word included an interview given by the killer just before he croaked from cancer, briefly a free man though restrained by drips and monitors in hospital. A basically disgraceful programme was saved by one beautiful new euphemism. Scar-faced old geezers, interviewed in bars or cafes, were captioned "Kray associate". A term generally used in legal firms and newspapers is now gently employed to mean crook, gangster, killer.

Mission Films, which sold two UK transmissions of the programme to the BBC, is associated with some of these Kray associates. For the BBC to justify its association with the show, there needed to be sociological or criminological interest: an insight into the mind of a murderer, a discussion of the culture of violence which bred the Krays and the romantic myth about them lovingly encouraged by books and films.

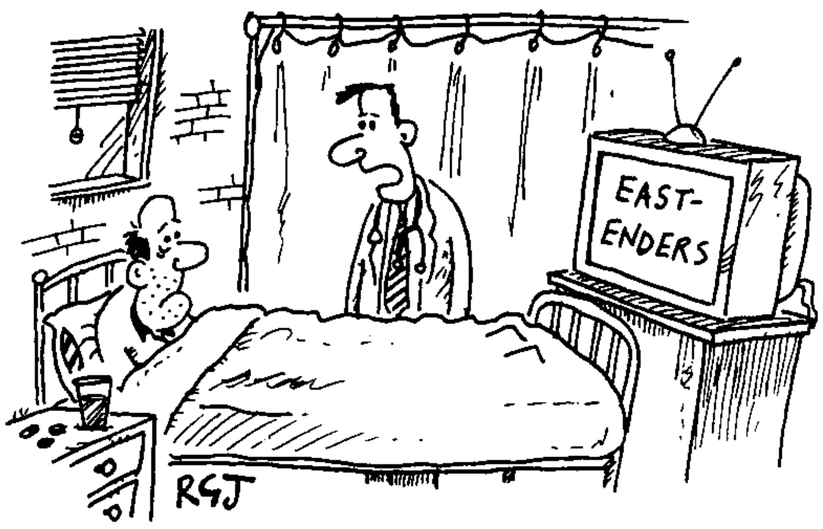
No such public interest justification was achieved because the programme was so journalistically inept. The questions – from a disembodied cockney voice – dutifully avoided crucial follow-ups, much as the drinkers in The Blind Beggar turned their faces to the wall while the Krays dealt with an associate.

Incredibly, when Reggie confessed to a murder other than the one for which he was jailed, his questioner never pressed for names or details. In the same way, the claims by Kray's widow and his associates that the prison authorities deliberately ignored the symptoms of his cancer should surely at least have been put to a senior screw.

But, with the single exception of a brave segment dealing with Ronnie and Reggie's sexuality, the film presented the twins' case unchallenged. It was presented as gospel that their convictions resulted from a "show trial" in which the judge was hopelessly in cahoots with the cops. The doc even lovingly bought into the legend that Reggie could have been a great boxer if his life had been better directed. He coulda been a contender, Charlie.

These sentimental suggestions, however, merely fulfilled the grim promise of the documentary's soppy opening, in which Reggie talked of the joy of hearing the voices of children in a nearby school after his 33 years inside.

It's probably only to be expected these days that, after the soft treatment given to the Son of Violet, rather more scepticism was applied to the **Son of God**. But, though this may be a secular age in regard to religion, the media remain remarkably credulous in other areas: for example, publicity hype.



"I think we've located the source of your chronic depression"

Most daily newspapers gave space to the claim by the series to have revealed the face of Christ. Techniques used in forensic detection had been employed to project the likely face of a Galileean of the period

from skulls found in the region. The resulting Face of Christ gazed out from tabloids and broadsheets last week. But this facial recreation is scientific nonsense. Forensic projection reveals only the likely features of the owner of the skull in question. So unless the producers happened by luck to have found the actual skull of the preacher called Jesus – a find which would lead to most of Christian theology being rewritten anyway – the central sequence of the series is meaningless.

Imagine that TV producers in 2000 years, after a global

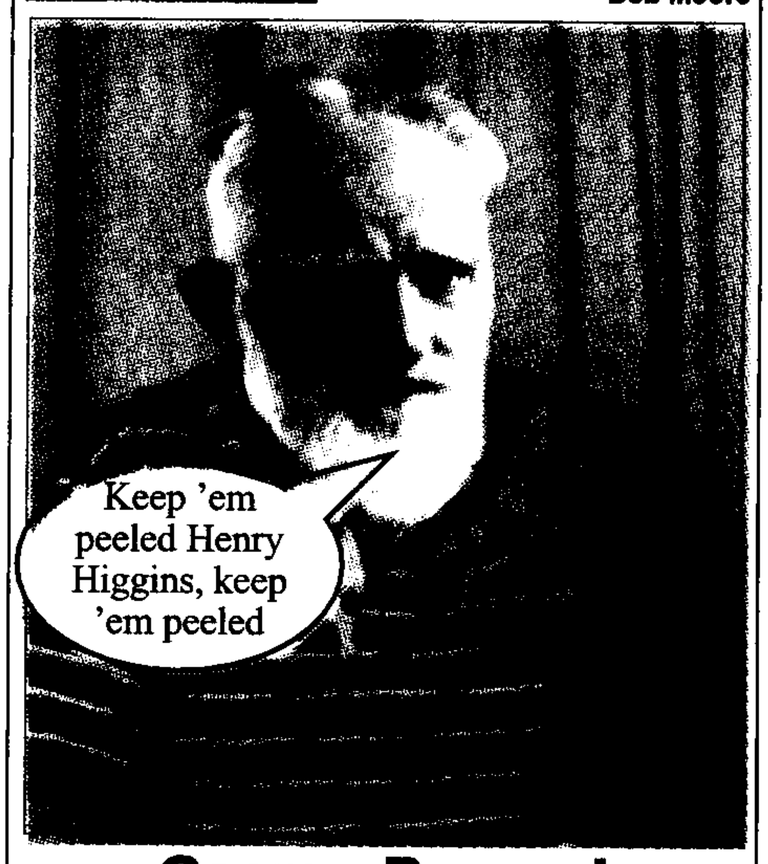
internet crash had wiped all information, were desperate to know what Tony Blair looked like. In an East End cemetery, they find the bones of Reggie Kray and conclude that the prime minister was a gaunt bruiser, a stocky little ex-boxer with a crew cut. The series' science is as crap as that. But then the show's whole approach is flawed. The aim is to show how key biblical events – resurrection, Christ sweating blood – may have been medically possible. Blood can leave the pores under extreme stress. The whole point about Christianity, though, is that its claims defy the laws of physics. Religion depends on supernatural events. The two options available in response to these propositions are to have belief inthe irrationalities of the narrative or to reject them as ridiculous.

The argument that it could all have happened naturally is irrelevant to either side. Jeremy Bowen, speaking from a helicopter wherever possible, declares excitedly that the evidence proves that there was almost certainly a preacher called Jesus, who may or may not have been the Son of God. But this claim is complete orthodoxy. Even the most ardent atheists accept that there was probably a preacher in Galilee of some kind, whose life became the subject of a cult. The interesting question – mainly ignored here – is why, 2000 years after his death, you have a Church of England and, indeed, a BBC Religion department, such as it is. The aim of religious programmes may be to make viewers say "God help us", but not quite in the way that this series provokes the observation.

'Square Eyes'

SPLIT personalities

Bob Moore



George Bernard Shaw Taylor

DUMB BRITAIN

Steve Wright in the Afternoon, Radio 2

SW: As what is the country previously known as Ceylon now known?
Contestant: Vietnam

The Weakest Link, BBC2

Anne Robinson: The name given to Madonna's 1990 world tour was Blonde what?
Contestant: Tart?
AR: Which actress named Patricia is the wife of Nicholas Cage?
Contestant: Patricia Routledge.
AR: What is the name of the 1994 Oscar winning film which starred Ben Kingsley as Yitzak Stern?
Contestant: *Gandhi*.
AR: Complete the title of the well-known play, *The Iceman...*
Contestant: Melts.
AR: In what year of the 90s did badminton and basketball become Olympic medal sports?
Contestant: 1984

National Lottery Jet Set, BBC1

Question: Which food is the Welsh town of Caerphilly famous for?
Contestant: Cornish pasties.
Question: Which is the world's largest continent?
Contestant: The Pacific.

THE news of Greg Dyke's £1m shareholding in the Ambassador Theatre Group (ATG), which has a programme-making alliance with the ITV company Carlton Communications, will come as little surprise to readers who have followed previous *Eye* stories about the connection between ATG and the BBC (see 1018, 1019).

Before Christmas the head of BBC Worldwide, Rupert Gavin, who bought a £50,000 stake in ATG in February and has sat on the board of directors since January, circulated an email to BBC staff offering discounted seats to the West End show, *Puppetry of the Penis*. The show, which involves two Australian blokes performing mind-blowing acts of "genital origami", played until 6 January at the Whitehall Theatre, owned by, er, ATG. The duo from Down Under were also chosen to bring in the new year on the digital channel, BBC Choice, with a programme called *Tackle Happy: The Puppetry of the Penis*. How long can it be before Carlton makes a follow-up?

LUVVIES

"Wow! I love it up here... I want to thank everyone I've ever met in my life."

JULIA ROBERTS at the Oscar Awards
(only omitting to thank Erin Brockovich, the real life heroine of the film)

An occasional column devoted to gems from the acting profession. £10 paid for entries.

AS a petrified Sophie Wessex sucks up to the blackmailing *News of the World*, what's happened to her husband's planned exposé of the horrid tabloid media?

Back in August 1999, Hollywood trade paper *Variety* reported that the Earl of Wessex had "recruited top Hollywood stars to participate in a documentary on the paparazzi being made by his TV company, Ardent Productions."

"Provisionally titled 'Stalkarazzi,' the show will reportedly feature both Tom Cruise and Brad Pitt, and will contain a controversial section on the death of Princess Diana." Or maybe it won't.

GOING LIVE

RADIO 4's *Today* programme was very thorough in its coverage of the fall to earth of Russia's Mir space station.

Presenter Sarah Montague went live to Trevor Kanty, a tuna fishing captain somewhere in the Pacific, and asked him: "Did you see anything?"

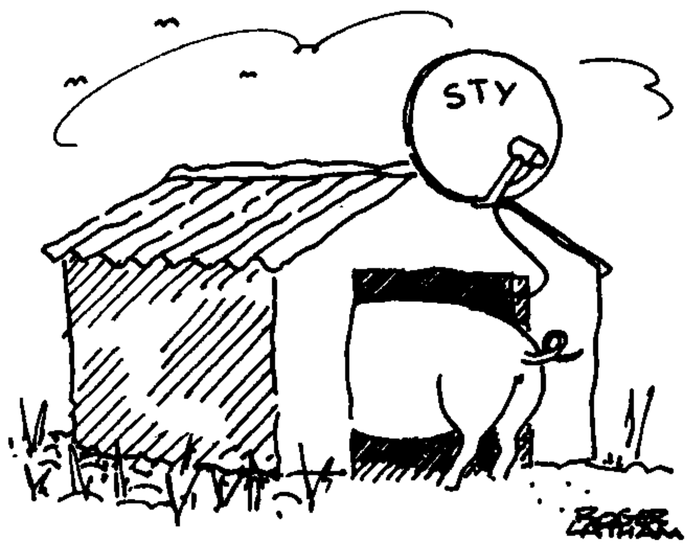
"No I didn't – we have zero visibility here," replied Trevor.

WHILE his father was busy attacking the Dalai Lama for trundling around the world in Gucci loafers and daring to visit Taiwan, younger son James Murdoch has been doing his duty by the Digger, or Old Deng as he is widely known in Asian circles.

The Murdochs still harbour vague dreams of being allowed to transmit their pisspoor Star TV signal out of Hong Kong into the rest of China, and to that end young Jim lad has been given the task of proving the family's pro-Beijing credentials.

So far his best shot has been to lambast the absurd but huge Falun Gong meditation club for being a dangerous "apocalyptic" cult. Doubtless spurred by the presence of Old Deng in the audience (a business seminar in Los Angeles) and hoping he might eventually be preferred to take over News Corp over luckless Lachlan who runs News Corp's loss-making Australian ventures, James went on to explain to the world's media that they have no business making criticisms of Communist China.

It remains to be seen whether such obvious sucking up can wipe out the black mark earned by the Digger in 1993 when he boasted that all "totalitarian regimes" were rightly terrified of satellite TV services, such as Star, managed, as it happens, by young Jim lad.



MUSIC & MUSICIANS

The Arts Cancel

IT IS good to see that in the scramble to get on the train of grief for foot and mouth disease, the nation's artists haven't been entirely left behind.

Listeners to Radio 4's *Today* programme last week heard a poignant epitaph to dead sheep from poet laureate Andrew Motion. And no wonder. Like so many toilers in the fields of culture, Mr Motion will by now have realised that this disease threatens the livelihoods of more than farmers and hoteliers. It threatens all those out-of-town arts festivals on which musicians, writers and their kind depend for summer income.

The festivals themselves are shaking in their no doubt disinfected boots – launching their programmes, making contracts, selling tickets when they know perfectly well that they may not be able to proceed.

The first victim has already fallen: the St Endellion Easter Festival, which takes place in rural North Devon – except this year, it has just announced, it won't. All contracts cancelled. And the countless country-house opera festivals which sell on off-the-beaten track charm look particularly vulnerable. Venues like Grange Park, Iford Manor and Longborough are keeping very quiet about their proximity to sheep. And so is Glyndebourne, where the season opens dangerously soon, in May.

As any Glyndebourne picnicker knows, there are nights when you can barely hear the sigh of your de-corked champagne for bleating. And it's not the dowager two hampers down the lawn. Oh for the times when F&M meant nothing worse than Fortnum & Mason.

Meanwhile a safely urban festival – Edinburgh – has just published its programme for the summer. Among the highlights is a concert series called *The Organs of Edinburgh* which features all the major instruments in the city. Save one: the organ in the festival's main concert venue, the Usher Hall. The reason for this odd omission is quite simple: the Usher Hall organ doesn't work.

Its unplayable condition has been an Edinburgh scandal for the past 20 years – with laughable consequences... like the time the distinguished organist Gillian Weir was engaged for a concerto. The orchestra played in the Usher Hall, as expected. But Dame Gillian (as she now is) played in St Giles Cathedral, a mile or so along the road, with the sound relayed back to the Hall through speakers. At the end, she took her bow courtesy of a waiting car with a police escort.

In retrospect these things are funny, but they are not the hallmark of a serious international enterprise. A city spokesman last week said he "hoped" the organ would be fixed by the summer of 2002. The summer of 2001 was apparently out of the question. After two decades of waiting, what's another year?

Orchestral Manoeuvres

MANY readers will recall Ian Maclay's great days with the RPO, when he was famous for fielding two or three Royal Philharmonics a night. He eventually came unstuck when the local impresario in Egypt read in the *Daily Telegraph* that the RPO was giving a concert in London when it was supposed to be accompanying his *Aida* beneath the Pyramids.

Maclay left and has since transformed the fortunes of the BBC Concert Orchestra.

But alas! Having been caught by the BBC not declaring a potential conflict of interest in a publishing company, Maclay told the players this week that he was leaving them. There were few prizes for guessing where he would go – and, yes, he is now a consultant back at the Royal Philharmonic.

The RPO has been without a manager ever since John Manger was invited to leave. Who better than the old fixer, Maclay, to restore the RPO's fortunes? Now it has the chance to bring back Maclay.

'Lunchtime O'Boulez'

AD NAUSEAM

IF ONLY everything in life were as reliable as a Volkswagen ad.

When advertisers need to justify their existence – indeed, to justify their own self-proclaimed status as the world's best – they invariably turn to this long-running, award-busting sump of simplicity and sans serif typefaces.

It was the world's first proper campaign, in the sense that someone worked out that people's purchasing decisions aren't all made on the spot: sometimes you build up a longer term affiliation with a brand and a bit further down the line you splash out. So Volkswagen, in partnership with an American agency called DDB, started trying to be our friend.

In Britain, VW ads are handled by BMP, part of the same DDB network; and in general they have followed the American creed to the letter with concordant success.

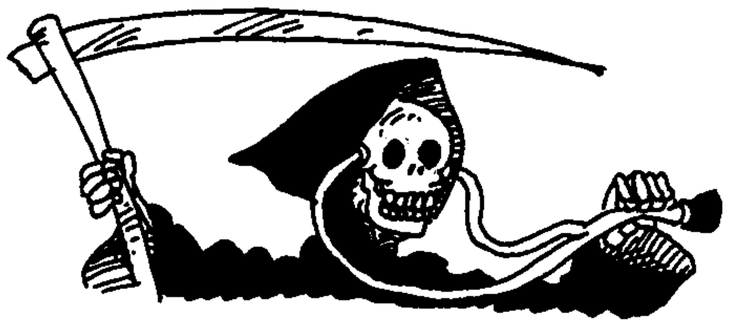
Then came the minor hiccup of the 1999 TV spots for the then-new Golf, in which everyday folk held placards indicating that there was more to them than there seemed... which was also true of the Golf. Classic Volkswagen: they concede that their car may not look all that special, whilst assuring us that it is. But, oops, this idea was 'borrowed' directly from Young British Artist Gillian Wearing, who understandably kicked up an almighty fuss.

Then last year the new Beetle was launched, a cheeky, fun, already-popular product and a real shoo-in for an advertiser. On the other side of the pond, the Yanks stuck to the usual blueprint – roughly speaking, keep it simple – using a small picture of the Beetle and a pert quip: "If you were really good in a past life, you come back as something better."

BMP was handed a golden opportunity, which it proceeded to miss with some aplomb, printing cutouts of the Beetle shape in contrasting materials: "Fun on the outside, serious on the inside". If you didn't catch them, that's because they were taken down pretty quickly, once folk started to twig that they were strangely similar to some Nissan Micra ads (another cheeky, fun car) that had surfaced but five years previously.

And now the Golf gets another run. We can see the formula at work. Okay, so, let's say that Golfs are really good. So you don't want to spoil them. So leave them alone. Thus, the line is "Some things are best left alone". Fair enough, except that this is the same thought behind the new Passat work.

"It's too late, Bob. I've found someone else"



DOING THE ROUNDS

Do you speak English?

ASYLUM seekers who've been dispossessed and tortured often have significant mental health problems that would benefit from psychotherapy through an interpreter. Unfortunately many psychology services across the UK are either unable or unwilling to provide access to interpreters, blaming the NHS bureaucracy for not funding the service.

This is more understandable in areas with few non-English speaking patients, but in other areas such as Oxford, which has a large immigrant and asylum population, it is inexcusable. It is also illegal since the NHS has a statutory duty to provide the service. Still, if they don't speak English and don't have an interpreter, they're hardly like to complain, are they?

A tissue of sighs

THE department of health's knee-jerk response to the organ retention problem is to set up a national commission which will send round a team of four volunteers – including a pathologist – to catalogue every single block of tissue and histological slide on display.

In addition they have to check every cabinet and cupboard in every room in every hospital in the NHS for missing bits and pieces. If they come across a locked cabinet or cupboard, the owner must sign an affidavit swearing that it does not contain retained tissue or be forced to open it.

Given the already short supply of histopathologists in the NHS – there are now more than 100 vacant posts in England and Wales – this seems like a ludicrous waste of time for an already over stretched, demonized and demoralized workforce.

The absurdity of the current situation has been further highlighted by a London consultant asked to perform an autopsy by the coroner. On opening the heart he discovered a calcaneous nodule (ie a piece of chalk) which he was ordered to return intact with all the organs. Presumably in case the relatives want to bury it.

"I'm afraid we're going to have to extract 48% of your prostate through your penis... APRIL FOOL! You should be OK with these tablets"

Just for kids?

THE first meeting of the Paediatric Cardiac Services Review (PCSR) has taken place (*Eyes passim*) with senior figures from the department of health, cabinet office and Welsh, Scottish and Northern Ireland assemblies in attendance, along with three surgeons, two cardiologists, an anaesthetist, an intensivist, two nurses, a pathologist and... um... one patient. No one is publicly admitting they are privy to the contents of the Bristol inquiry report, but the clinicians are already "predicting" a reduction in the number of centres performing child heart surgery to four or five, with four surgeons operating on each site.

Each surgeon will have to do a minimum of 200 cases a year and the government is keen for them just to do children. However, many paediatric heart surgeons supplement their modest NHS income by doing private bypass grafts on adults. Expect a big showdown if health secretary Alan Milburn tries to force the issue.

Unfair advantage

THE much delayed second Royal Brompton heart surgery report was out on 2 April but the Down Syndome Association (DSA) was denied access to it, as previously promised, a week in advance.

However, the hospital was given a week's viewing to prepare its response well in advance of the press conference. This preferential treatment of the trust over the families and the DSA infuriated one inquiry panel member, Ruth Evans, and suggests a element of white washing. Doctors who have since left the Brompton believe there were significant staffing problems which affected the quality of the heart surgery service, but such a criticism is true of much of the rest of the NHS.

In Boston (America, not Lincs), the death rates after child heart surgery are the best in the world (less than 1 percent) and it has six times the number of paediatric cardiologists than the average UK centre. Surely some coincidence?

M.D.

SIGNAL FAILURES

Focus on safety systems

LAST week's rail safety report highlights the shambles successive governments have made of train protection. But what are the chances the same fiasco won't be repeated?

The report of the joint inquiry into train protection following the Southall and Paddington crashes essentially finds that, to get where it ought to be, the rail industry should ideally not start from where it is now – ie bogged down in the amateurish train protection warning system (TPWS).

That some form of automatic train protection (ATP) is needed to stop trains passing red signals has been known since the Clapham Junction report in 1989. It advised fitting ATP to all lines within 10 years – and was ignored by the Tories. Now all energies are devoted to TPWS, which "aims to mitigate rather than prevent" signals being passed at danger, in the joint inquiry's words.

The report says the original estimate of £23m for TPWS has already risen to "over £450m" – and there's a long way to go before all routes are equipped. Britain is "just about the only country in the world that runs high-speed trains and mixed traffic without the benefit of modern ATP systems," as one expert told the joint inquiry.

Alas, British Rail's ATP is now out of date because electronic technology has moved on since the early 1990s and the report advises that the next generation, called European train control system (ETCS), should be fitted once it's available.

The tragedy – apart from the 38 deaths at Paddington and Southall – is that ATP, once fitted, could have been upgraded to ETCS because both systems work on the same principle. But the home-made TPWS is incompatible with ETCS, and many trains now being fitted with TPWS will have to be fitted a new with ETCS equipment within a few years.

Thames Trains is now putting TPWS on all its trains, even though the crucial tracks into Paddington were equipped 10 years ago with an ATP system which works reasonably well; Railtrack will have to fit a second protection system (TPWS) on those tracks by 2003 – and then provide a third one (ETCS) by 2006.

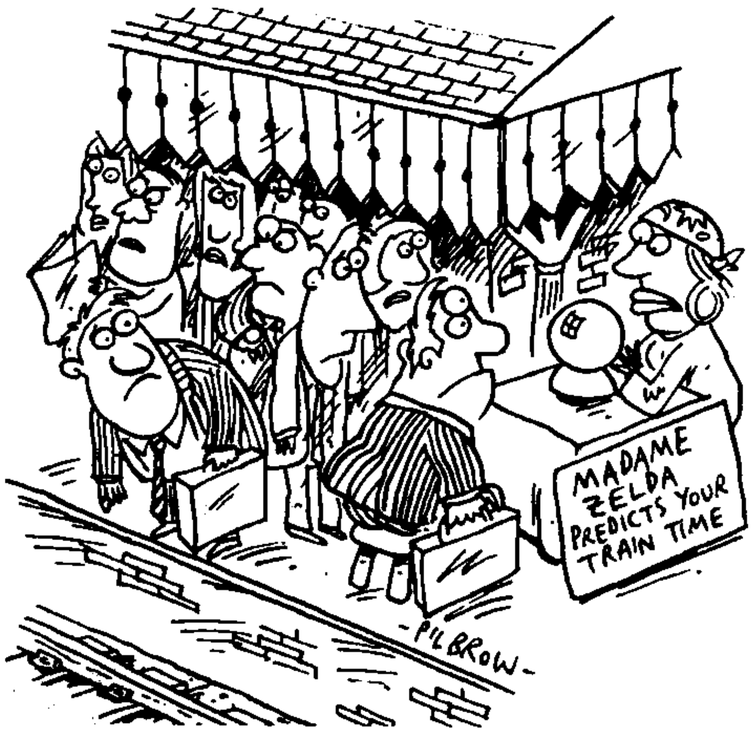
TPWS is still widely thought to be cheaper than ATP, but the latter has always been expected to cover all signals all the time. TPWS will cover only 11,000 signals and won't prevent about 40 percent of the accidents ATP would have stopped. If TPWS had to meet the same goal as ATP, its cost would be vastly greater.

The cost of fitting ATP comprehensively was put at £475m in 1994, according to the joint inquiry. The latest estimate for the partial fitting of TPWS is over £450m – for a system that's nowhere near as effective as ATP – and could be obsolete before its installation is finished!

Such is the stupidity that arises when politicians ignore the advice of a safety inquiry – but it could all happen again. Last week's recommendation that ETCS should be used by all trains exceeding 100mph by 2008 could well be kicked into the long grass, as ATP was, in a few years' time because it presents technical challenges and because TPWS will already be giving some of the protection for which ETCS is designed.

● VIRGIN Trains will make up for its January freeze on fares with a vengeance next month. A leaked document from the company states Virgin's intention to increase standard open, first open and Virgin business fares "by up to 9.5 percent across all routes". Saver tickets should increase by about 9 percent on average, and business savers by £5. Strangely, the document says nothing about Virgin improving its services by 9.5 percent on pre-Hatfield performance to merit this rise, let alone the previous ones.

'Dr B. Ching'



Down on the Fish Farm

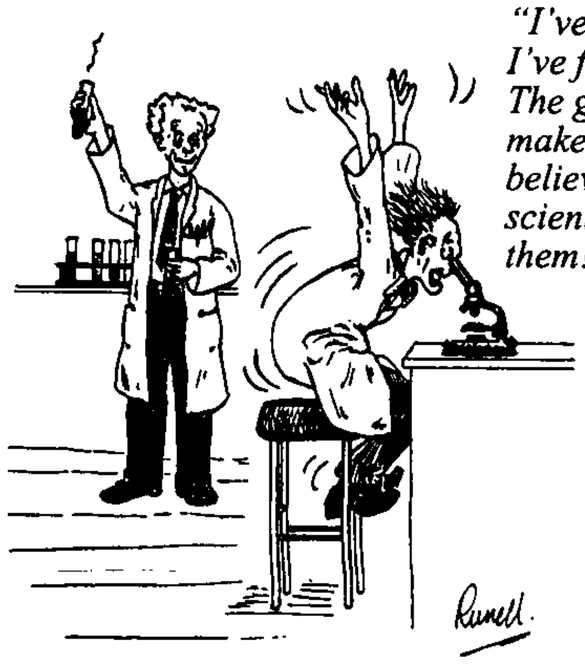
BIRDS of a feather don't always flock together. The respected BBC television reporter Julian Pettifer was asked last year to resign as president of the RSPB because the Beeb said this role conflicted with a programme he was making about factory salmon farming.

Meanwhile Pettifer's "Jock" counterpart, Lord Jamie Lindsay, ex-Tory government environment minister and chairman of the RSPB Scottish committee, remains on his perch — in spite of also being chairman of Scottish Quality Salmon, the fake fish farmers' representative body.

RSPB Scotland, along with other groups, supports a call for a public inquiry into the environmental damage caused by factory salmon farming (*Eyes passim*). RSPB members might wonder how Lord Lindsay can act on their behalf while at the same time fighting the fish farmer's corner.

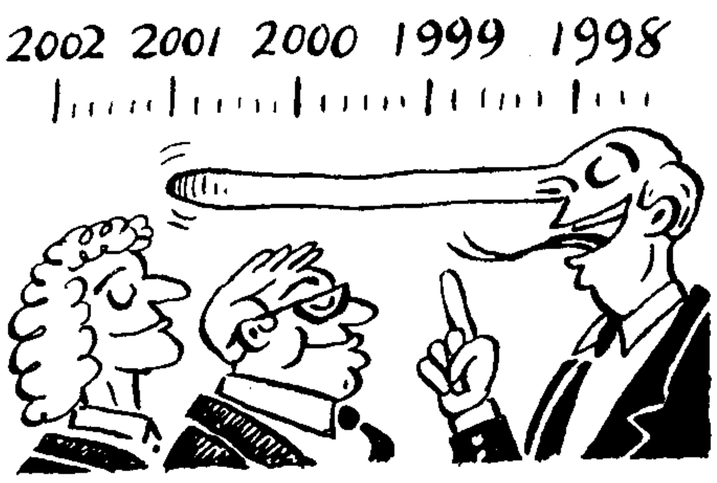
The TV programme that caused all the fuss was *Warnings from the Wild*, which was broadcast in January. It infuriated Lord Lindsay, who immediately sent angry letters to the BBC on his members' behalf (fish farmers, that is, not twitchers).

'Old Trout'



"I've found it, I've found it!! The gene which makes people believe anything scientists tell them!"

ROTTEN BOROUGHS



HACKNEY MISCARRIAGE

THE stench emanating from Hackney's Conservative and Liberal Democrat parties grows more overpowering by the day.

Last month Tory councillor Isaac Leibowitz and Lib Dem Zev Lieberman were convicted at Wood Green crown court of vote-rigging on a massive scale in the 1998 council elections. Tricking pensioners into giving away proxy votes, inventing non-existent voters at phoney addresses, putting the names of minors and non-British citizens on the register… they did it all.

Their efforts almost certainly cost Labour victory at the election. But when the pair were charged, the cry went up from their local parties: "Innocent until proved guilty!" and they were not suspended. Now they have been found guilty, the cry is the less-catchy "er, not really guilty until the appeal process is exhausted!" They have reluctantly been "administratively suspended" but can still sit and vote in meetings.

Tory group leader Eric Ollerenshaw, rather than condemning the crooks, says they were "good men and good representatives of their community" while Lib Dem leader Mark Williams says "natural justice demands that irrevocable action is not taken". Both leaders are afraid of losing the votes of Hackney's orthodox Jews — making the patronising assumption that Jewish voters do not care if they are represented by a crook, as long as he is Jewish. When the pair — liable to up to 10 years in jail — are sentenced later this month, such arguments will hopefully become redundant.

WHAT A WALKER

WOE betide those who dare cross the regime of Comrade Ken Walker in the People's Republic of Middlesbrough.

Former Labour councillor Chris Snowdon was deselected by his former comrades in 1999 after questioning the council's mysterious desire to rubber-stamp a plan by Middlesbrough FC to extend the club's Riverside stadium. Since being cast out Snowdon has been something of a thorn in the side of the Walker regime. Indeed, he recently suggested publicly that the debate on whether the town should opt for a mayor or a cabinet system under local government reform would be a waste of time if "abuse of patronage" were allowed to continue.

At council meetings Snowdon sits quietly in the public gallery and listens. What annoys the powers that be is that he refuses to stand for the entrance of the mayor or deputy mayor. Unfortunately for Snowdon, the current deputy is Pat Walker, wife of Ken Il-Sung.

Middlesbrough's ridiculous chief executive John Foster is now defending Mrs W's dignity by barring Snowdon from the town hall for six months. The ban, in breach of the 1972 local government act, not to mention the human rights act, has been enforced by private security guards at a cost to council taxpayers of an estimated £2,000 for the first month. On the day of the important budget-setting meeting last month more than a dozen guards employed by Securicor and local firm Pro-Line were drafted in to keep Snowdon out. He was 250 miles away in Bristol that day, so the massed ranks of heavies were an even bigger illegal waste of money than usual.

DECISION OF THE WEEK

TOWN councillors have decided on the inscription they want on the King Edward VII water fountain in Frinton.

At a meeting of Frinton and Walton Town Council, it was agreed that the words should read Town Council of Frinton and Walton.

Frinton & Walton Gazette

FILTHY JOKE

LAMBETH is famous for its filthy streets and lousy rubbish collection, so full marks for trying to do something about it. The problem, apparently, is that residents have not been putting out their wheelie bins properly.

The council has therefore issued a "Wheeled Bin Protocol" in the form of a leaflet distributed to homes. "We have set out a criteria (*sic*) for establishing which premises can and which cannot accommodate wheeled bins," it explains, listing "Physical Criteria for exempting Properties that cannot Accommodated (*sic*) a Wheeled Bin."

Those are the bits in clear English. Residents are scratching their heads over the stern injunction: "The bin must be presented within two metres of the curtilage on collection day." Most have given up trying understand by the time they reach the sentence: "In favour of exempting the wheeled bins as a method of storage and collection of refuse that are willing to abide by the partnership rules." After protests from baffled residents about the leaflet the council has decided to, er, bin it.

● **SHORTAGE of space forbids us from detailing the full catalogue of alleged misdemeanours that have led to the suspension of Durham county council's operations manager Ron Thompson on full pay. The council has launched an internal inquiry which will no doubt get to the bottom of such questions as: why did a senior council officer need a doll's house delivered to his home by the council's "rapid response" repairs unit; what is wrong with Thompson's central heating; and why is a distressed young female council employee off sick? Mr Thompson, too, is "off sick". In Majorca.**

SNAIL MAIL

NEIGHBOURS of Mohamed Fayed's Fulham football ground, who had objected to Hammersmith council's decision to grant permission to the phoney pharaoh's plan to redevelop Craven Cottage and increase its capacity from 20,000 to 30,000, hugely increasing the impact of noise, traffic, parking problems and yobbery on local residents, were astonished by a letter they received from the council's environment department.

Planning permission had been granted, wrote assistant director Nigel Pallace, on condition "that there would be no likely significant ecological effect on invertebrate species", in particular a rare snail, *Pseudamnicola confusa*, that had been found on the river wall. However, a further survey had established, wrote Pallace, that poor old *P. confusa* was not, in fact, a Fulham resident after all, and so the development could proceed.

Requests that equal consideration should be given to the welfare of the large colony of vertebrates (*Homo sapiens*), whose habitat is also threatened, appear to have been ignored.

Princess Anne unveiled the plaque to a rapturous round of applause.

West Somerset Free Press

Number crunching

£50,000

■ Compensation for the widow of PC Fulton, the Strathclyde police officer who was killed by a schizophrenic while on duty

£250,000

■ Compensation for Angela Vento, a trainee policewoman whose feelings were hurt when she was branded the "office trollop"

WELSH SPORT
Mass cull begins on Welsh border
A mass cull of 10,000 sheep and 500 cattle is under way on the Welsh border with Herefordshire.

BBC News (Wales) website

IT'S GRIM UP NORTH LONDON

KNIFE & PACKER

IT'S MURDER! ONE OF THE WORST THINGS ABOUT HAVING KIDS IS THE PARKING…
OF COURSE: THE SCHOOL RUN, AT THE PARK, OUTSIDE THE NUTRITIONIST
OH NO NOT THAT- IT'S OUR THREE-WHEELER BUGGY. MOST CAFÉS HAVE NO FACILITIES FOR THEM AT ALL

NOOKS and CORNERS

WHILE London is threatened with a forest of vertical features (by My Lord Foster, Renzo Piano and other stratospheric genii) Northampton has a real tower — a beautiful tower, an original, unique tower — that is threatened.

Little known, it could be one of the town's attractions. Not that Northampton is short of attractions. It has a wonderful 17th century church, a stunning Gothic town hall and a museum which is the delight of the shoe fetishist; it has a house by Charles Rennie Mackintosh and another by Peter Behrens — both built for the model railway manufacturer, W.H. Bassett-Lowke. And now it has the Express Lift Tower.

The Lift Tower was built in 1980-82 for testing high-speed lifts. More than 400 feet tall, it is the taller of only two such things in Europe. It was designed by Stimpson & Walton with the Michael Barclay Partnership, engineers, and its reinforced concrete structure contains three shafts. There is a laboratory and an observation gallery at the top.

What matters now is that the thing is beautiful, for it tapers parabolically towards the distinctive pierced summit: a cross between a lighthouse and the tall campanile of some exotic modern cathedral. And now it is redundant.

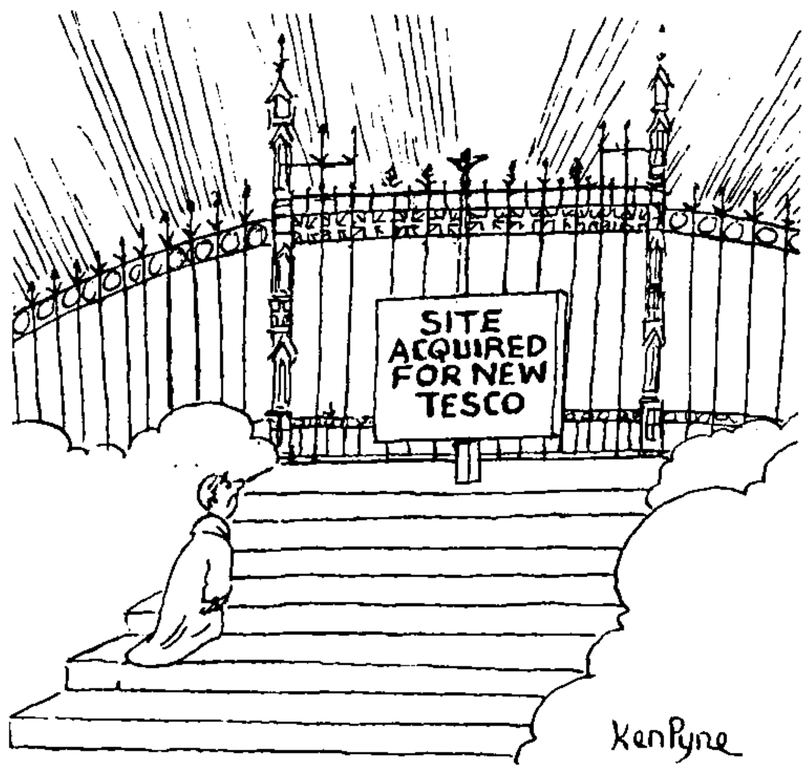
Fortunately in 1997 English Heritage had the wit to list the thing, grade II. Then, last year, the industrial site on which the Express Lift Tower stands was bought by Wilcon Homes. At first, the firm promised that the tower would be the centrepiece of its proposed replacement residential development. But now — surprise, surprise — Wilcon Homes claims that the tower is suffering from concrete cancer and must come down lest it endanger the lives of little kiddies, etc.

Presumably, before buying the land, Wilcon surveyed the listed structure on the site first; so it does seem rum that concrete cancer should only now be diagnosed – or did it just assume that something so modern must be dispensable?

Well, it isn't. With some intelligence and enterprise, the Lift Tower could become one of Nottingham's major assets. After all, Glasgow has just built itself a gratuitous new landmark tower by the Clyde — designed by Richard Hordern — yet the Northampton Tower is taller, and better. And one thing is absolutely certain: none of the Noddy houses Wilcon Homes plans to build on the site will ever begin to approach the distinction of the tower, let alone be proposed for listing.

"AJ100", a survey of the architectural profession in the latest issue of the Architects' Journal, makes deeply depressing reading as it confirms the worst about modern architects. What an introverted, incestuous and conventional mutual admiration society they make.

Asked "Who do you admire the most?", top of the list comes, yes, Foster & Partners. Despite the abject failure of the Wobbly Bridge and the sheer vulgarity of the British Museum, let alone the ruthless, blinkered arrogance of My Lord Foster, 50 percent of the profession thinks he's simply great. Perhaps this statistic correlates with the result of the survey of UK architectural fee income for 2000, for Foster & Partners come top of that list as well, with £29m, confirming that what architects really admire is not artistry or subtlety or charm or character but naked success.



But the really depressing, and revealing, result is the response to the question "If you had not become an architect, what else would you have been?" An artist? Only 4.2 percent. A musician? 5.7 percent. A writer? A mere 1.4 percent — the same proportion as might have been planners. So please forget any old-fashioned notions that architects want to create beautiful buildings or to make the world a better place: the profession that a clear majority of architects might otherwise have entered is... the law.

Yes, 14.2 percent of architects would be lawyers if they were not architects. So what they really want to do is to wear suits, be self-important, boss other people around and make lots of money. What a sad comment on the Mother of the Arts.

ENGLISH Heritage is, rightly, trying to resist the colossal tower proposed for Bishopsgate (*Eye* 1014), but its case is morally undermined by its own curious *volte-face* over the Baltic Exchange — thanks to the last chairman, Jocelyn Stevens.

At first English Heritage argued for the restoration of the IRA bomb-damaged grade II* listed building, but then it changed its mind and decided that a replacement designed for Swiss Re by, yes, Norman Foster — the "Gherkin" — was simply terrific (*Eyes passim ad nauseam*). For the full story of this shameful business, I recommend the article by Mira Bar-Hillel in the *ArtWatch UK Newsletter* No12 for winter 2001/01.

'Piloti'

YOUNG BRITISH ARTISTS

BY BIRCH

This series had better be good— I'm sick of folk taking the piss out of our movement!
BBC2
THE NEW EASTENDERS
THE ART WORLD OF LONDON'S HOXTON
Right!
Making out we're all self-regarding media farts!
That was perfect, darlings! We'll weave it into the second episode.
RUFUS STREET
STUDIO TO RENT

MAN IN THE EYE: Tony Baldry MP

FOR most Tory MPs the years since Labour's victory have been an unmitigated nightmare. But there is one who has enjoyed an astonishing transformation in his fortunes during the spell in opposition.

In January 1997, when he was an agriculture minister in the Major government, Tony Baldry MP was in such dire financial straits that he borrowed £5,000 from a solicitor friend, Sarosh Zaiwalla. He later had to apologise to the House for not registering the loan, or mentioning it when he recommended Zaiwalla for an honour just 12 days after receiving the cash.

But look what a difference four years can make. The man who was once reduced to cadging a £5,000 loan now has more outside interests than any other MP, plus a portfolio of shares worth millions. His many directorships include:

Transense Technologies plc, a firm developing tyre-monitoring technology for cars. Baldry's extensive work for Transense has been rewarded with 50,000 shares valued at the time of issue at £25 each (£1,250,000). Though the price has fallen slightly since then, he is still sitting on a large six-figure nest-egg.

Ximed plc, a British pharmaceutical and biotech company.

Oasis Ltd, a corporate finance firm specialising in Asia. By happy coincidence, Baldry (along with his pal Zaiwalla) runs the Asian Business Breakfast Club, which allows for plenty of schmoozing with Asian tycoons.

3DMI International Inc, a Detroit company specialising in "plastic technology and components for the automotive industry". It is run by one Bill Widger, an American who made a fortune from his stake in the Domino's pizza chain. Through Baldry's contacts Widger is looking to buy a plastics factory in the Czech republic. Which brings us, by another happy coincidence, to...

Graddo, a public company in the Czech republic manufacturing car components. And, for rest and recreation...

Pragokonzert, a Czech public company promoting classical music concerts.

The geographical range of Baldry's interests is awesome. He's on the board of Azmara plc, manufacturers of jute in India and investors in Indian new technology projects. He is chairman of Camco Corporation plc, owners of a woollen yarn factory in Kyrgyzstan, and of HAK Investments Ltd, the UK arm of Hassan A. Karim Al Ghathani Sons Co of Saudi Arabia. He is also "adviser on company promotion in overseas markets" to the RMC Group plc, a cement and construction firm.

One of his secretaries at the Commons has part of her salary paid directly by the Turkish Business Council; his parliamentary research assistant is part-funded by the Lighting Industry Federation. Baldry himself receives annual fees as adviser to the Construction Industry Council and the British Constructional Steelwork Association Ltd. Until two years ago he was also a director of MIG, a risk-assessment business run by former SAS man Stuart Polle-Robb, but Polle-Robb confirmed to the *Eye* that Tony Baldry had left after a "falling out".

Not surprisingly, Baldry has travelled widely over the past three years, with regular trips to India, Japan, the US, Saudi Arabia, Turkey, Kyrgizstan and the Czech republic. And, as if all that weren't enough, he is a practising barrister!

What Baldry's constituents in Banbury may care to ask is how on earth he has managed to fit in all these duties, and amass so much wealth, while supposedly working as a conscientious full-time MP.

Letters

Desperate Desmond

Sir,

I was in WH Smith today, searching in vain for a copy of Tom Bower's "The Paymaster". I bought a copy of the Eye instead.

The nice lady at the checkout informed me that with every "magazine" purchased, I was entitled to a free copy of the Daily Express, an offer which I declined because porn is so freely available on the internet these days.

DR ED WALKER,

W. Yorkshire.

Poke in the Eye

Sir,

I'm sure that the Eye doesn't begrudge the tens of millions raised by Red Nose Day, despite publishing the smug review by "Couch Potato" (whoever that might be, as your reviewer would probably say). So you won't be too upset that I'm saying "Pants to Private Eye" and giving my subscription money to Comic Relief. Perhaps you'll even publish the URL in case other readers want to do the same: http://www.comicrelief.com

PETER ANGHELIDES,

Via e-mail.

MMR and autism

Sir,

Re the letter from Dr Rob Wheatley, 23 March re MMR-autism debate. Like Dr Wheatley, I am a paediatrician, but unlike him I am not so complacent about the MMR-autism controversy.

I have worked in the same area for 20 years and have absolutely no doubt that the actual incidence in autistic spectrum disorder has increased. At long last, even the "experts" appear to be acknowledging this and not attributing it to a difference in diagnostic criteria.

This rise appears to coincide with the introduction of MMR. This is not scientific proof that the MMR causes autism. But at the very least we should be cautious. Parents should be allowed single vaccines if they choose.

Unlike Dr Wheatley, I feel if there is an epidemic of measles and resulting deaths (as there will be) it will be due to the intransigence of the medical establishment and policy makers. Generally, I am an enthusiastic supporter of immunisation and have no doubts about the efficacy and safety of the other vaccines used; however, I fear that if there is a link between MMR and autism, we will lose the trust of parents for years to come.

Yours sincerely,

DR JUNE BROWNING,

Community Paediatrician, Broughton.

Sir,

Re the witty and amusing letter written by the patronising Dr Wheatley. As the father of an autistic child who displayed no signs of being "odd" or "different" or even "below average" before his immunisation, I take great issue with his smug assertion that he has "yet to see any convincing evidence". The evidence, Dr Wheatley, is there to see in the seven-fold increase in autism in the UK since 1992.

Also, as a 39-year-old, I was never immunised against mumps, measles or rubella. I caught all three as a child, as did most of my contemporaries. The MMR issue is about saving money. It costs far less to immunise the kids all in one go than drag it out one at a time.

Remember your Hippocratic Oath: First do no harm... not even if it saves money!

Yours,

ALAN VILLIERS,

London N17.

Sir,

Dr Wheatley's letter on autism (Eye 1024) is confusing because it fails to differentiate people with subtle autistic problems (Asperger Syndrome) who might in previous times have simply gone unmarked, with those lower down the continuum whose disability could not have gone unnoticed in any epoch.

Unfortunately there is evidence that although this group is at the moment still much less numerous than Asperger sufferers, their numbers are rising steeply. Brent Taylor's epidemiological study of autism and the MMR (Lancet, June 12 1999) while perhaps not showing any correlation between the introduction of the jab and the rise of the disorder, nevertheless shows a 24-fold rise in the diagnosis of severe autistic spectrum disorders between the birth cohorts of 1979 and 1992.

This is the question. If Taylor is supposed to be taken seriously about the MMR, then why not also take him seriously about the existence of an autism epidemic?

Yours faithfully,

JOHN STONE,

London N22.

Lookalike

Puppet

Lady

Sir,

Has anybody else noted the uncanny resemblance between the intelligent, cultured and sophisticated Lady Penelope Creighton-Ward, and a plastic model of Geri Halliwell?

Yours faithfully,

S.D. WHITLOCK,

Guisborough, Yorks.

Horizontal hold

Sir,

Heaven forbid that Piloti should ever fall down one of his grand flights of steps and break his neck or become otherwise disabled, though he might then appreciate the value of accessibility in public buildings like Somerset House. But like all architectural historians (and architects) he cares more about "dominant horizontals" than the needs of people. Disabled people do not want to be shunted round the side "discreetly" but have the right to enter buildings with everyone else. It has nothing to do with political correctness, just good people-centred design, whether in wheelchairs, pushing buggies or infirm. The fact that the ramp in question is badly handled is another matter, it does not alter the ***principle****.*

Yours ever,

SHEILA MULLON (child buggy pusher),

London NW9.

No smoke without ire

Sir

The "pall of smoke" you predicted soon to be rising over the Birmingham, Erdington constituency following my decision not to contest the coming election will not happen.

1. No leaflets bearing my name have been printed though some posters have.

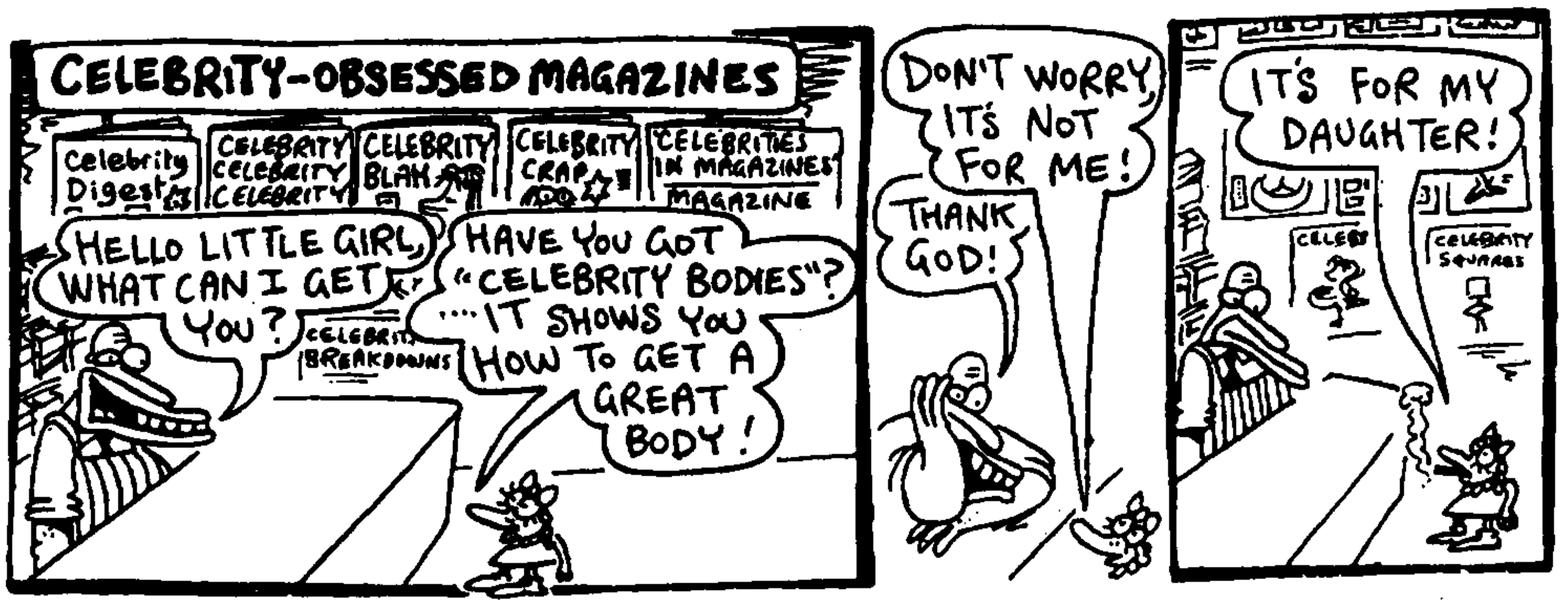
2. Labour's NEC cannot "shoo in a Blairite carpet-bagger" even if it wanted to. The local party will be consulted over the short list and choose a candidate from it by secret ballot. The selection will be made in an one-member-one-vote, again by secret ballot.

3. I did "abruptly" change my mind but no one offered me anything to do so.
After nine elections in 25 years I felt it time to stand down (though I do not intend to retire).

4. Shaun Woodward never expressed interest in Erdington and did not apply to be a candidate. You are also wrong to suggest that Derek Scott, who lives near Birmingham, who has applied, had prior knowledge. He did not. In fact, he wasn't as quick off the mark as a local councillor who applied three weeks before I made my decision!

ROBIN CORBETT MP,

Birmingham, Erdington.



Body double-take

Sir,

Any country in receipt of British arms sales must, from a journalistic point of view, have as poor a human rights record as can reasonably be constructed; but you are in error in the case of the Ukrainian government and its widely alleged involvement the "disappearance" of Georgy Gongadze (Eye 1024; 'Cannon Plodder', p26). You refer to "his headless corpse" being found last year, but this body has thus far not been identified as being that of Gongadze or, for that matter, anyone else. In fact, a brief report on today's Daily Telegraph (22 March) states that according to German DNA testing the body in question is definitely not that of Gongadze.

Yours,

NICK YOUNG,

Via e-mail.

I-SPY

Queen Street Station, Glasgow

Information
QUEEN STREET TOILETS
DUE TO INTERIOR ALTERATIONS THE ENTRANCE TO THE TOILETS IS NOW VIA LEFT LUGGAGE LOCKERS.

Submitted by Barbara Payne. £10 paid for similar submissions. *(SAE required for return of photographs. No transparencies.)*

ME, ME, ME

Sir,

I've been a subscriber to Private Eye for over two years now and I wanted to respond to your piece in Eye 1022 regarding Panorama and ME.

I have had a diagnosis of ME for five years after food poisoning, reactive arthritis and an unknown viral infection ruined my health. And, at 36 years old I am now retired from my NHS profession of diagnostic radiography.

During the last five years I've endured a total of 18 months of "rehabilitation" and subsequent deterioration thanks to the current NHS. I'm now campaigning for effective healthcare including basic differential diagnosis (currently withheld), clinical research and diagnostic investigations for what the NHS now admit to be a heterogeneous patient population labelled under one umbrella term.

Cognitive Behavioural Therapy and Graded Exercise (CBT/GE) does undoubtedly have damaging effects to those with underlying physiological pathology but as yet the NHS is impotent to help and the only way Action for ME could be said to be militant is in their appalling attitude when listening and responding effectively to their severely ill membership.

CBT/GE is undoubtedly the cheapest solution and does not help those genuinely severely ill; people who don't have any form of depressive condition. There is a whole stack of medical evidence asking for further research yet the government working party are due only to pay lip-service to the need for research and clinical investigation and at an undefined, un-checked time in the future. Could it be that the cost of actually doing something substantial would be a cost too much to afford real progress?

As things stand I'm waiting for the NHS to actually find its way to providing effective treatment instead of experimenting on people like myself with unproven theories and incompetent opinions; making my condition worse in the process.

Yours contemplating cancelling my membership,
STEPHEN RALPH,
Lymington, Hants.

Vesuvius UK Limited
A W Nielson Road
Goole, East Yorkshire, DN14 6UE
Closing Date: 9th March 2001
Vesuvius operate a non-smoking policy
Goole Times

A former lobbyist writes

Sir,

Re: HP Sauce, 22 March 2001. At last, Private Eye has got my name right! I'm pleased to finally make it into the HP Sauce section of your wonderful publication – but unfortunately your selective quote from the PR Week interview with me misses out probably the key quote of the whole thing.

I ended the article saying I would never give anyone preferential access and that "Like Al Gore, I would be there for the people, not the powerful". So much for Labour MPs and candidates being like lobbyists taking money from business for favours.

Might I add I have never taken any money from the Countryside Alliance to try to sway public opinion, I wonder if you know anyone who has?

Yours sincerely,
HOWARD DAWBER,
Labour Parliamentary Spokesperson for Cheadle.

More Consignia Lookalikes
Transitions
Stagecoach
IAWS group plc
Akamai

Colemanballs

£10 paid for contributions

"[Dwight Yorke's] white boots were on fire against Arsenal and he'll be looking for them to reproduce tonight."
RON ATKINSON, ITV
(Ken Wilson)

"...and it [the ball] just crept either side of the post."
CHRIS KAMARA, Sky Sports 1
(M.R. Cook)

"Andy Cole has at last broken his goal glut with his first goal for England."
Newsreader, Channel 5
(Eric Pain)

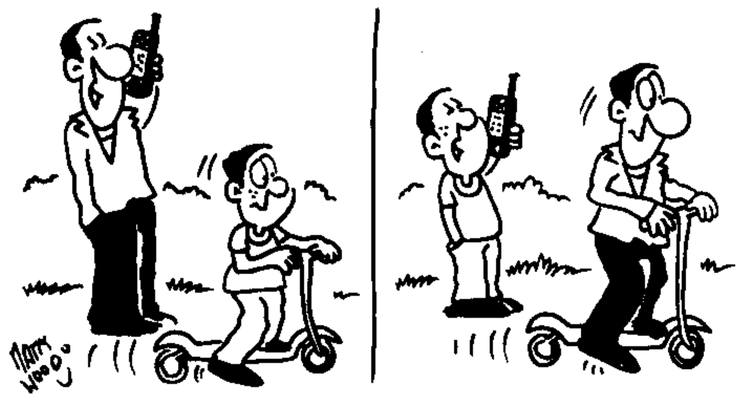
"In Scotland, the mass slaughter of farm animals has already begun. Further south, in Cumbria, a government minister has been dispatched."
Channel 4 News
(Tracey Szwagrzak)

"I've had an interest in racing all my life – or longer really."
KEVIN KEEGAN, Channel 4
(Steve Hunnisett)

HOM SAP

AUSTIN

How Things Change



Letter from **Bogotá**
from Our Own Correspondent

IT'S TOUGH living in the middle of a civil war; and it's not only among the two million of us uprooted by the drug and greed-filled killing that there are Colombians who wish to flee the guerrillas, the paramilitary deaths squads and the gangsters.

These days it's simpler than ever to leave. At the US consulate there are no unseemly visa queues. New regulations mean we just call to fix a time for an interview, where our case is considered. Of course, it can take a week to get through on the phone and it can take months to get an appointment.

Just at the moment, such unfortunate bottlenecks mean that only four of our handball squad hoping to take part in a tournament in Atlanta have visas, while the other 13 members of the team await their interview.

Your own European Union also welcomes us with open arms, but now also only with visas, introduced last month. And the list goes on. Even Afghanistan and Sierra Leone say our drug baron menace is such that only those with visas may visit. Meanwhile the US is helping our factions and armies in their task of making our lives ever more miserable by spraying pesticides so efficient that they deal not only with coca plants but all our food crops, too.

One lucky patriot able to escape our plight has been Alvaro Uribe Veléz, a far-right politician with his eye on the presidency. He has been the beneficiary of the generous support of your government during a recent stay with St Antony's College, Oxford. Don Alvaro brooks no compromise with leftist rebels. He wants more guns and fewer talks; a message, frighteningly, that opinion polls tell us is finding favour as frustration over efforts to promote peace founder.

Britain may think it is backing a winner in the urbane, wealthy former governor of Medellin. But our new gringo friends in Washington seem less sure such tough talking is the way forward. Word has it that young President Bush and his secretary of state Colin Powell are having cold feet about the Plan Colombia, a military support programme launched by Bill Clinton with much fanfare last year.

It was to be the final War on Drugs. In fact it seemed most likely just to further enrich our fat cats, perhaps rub out a few guerrillas and pour in new orders to US helicopter manufacturers. And now the White House is increasingly uneasy over the possibility that there may be casualties among the troops it is deploying here.

Worse still, our rebels, who have a fair amount of experience in this kind of thing, might just kidnap a few marines for an embarrassing ransom. Indeed, the brave revolutionaries in FARC don't waste time tiptoeing in the shadows waiting to nab some big knob. Their Pesca Mágica policy adopted this year - Magic Fishing - is based on the position that it's easier to hold up any old bus, given that there's bound to be someone on board worth even just a few pesos. It certainly beats fighting.

Pentagon officials have a nightmare in which they have to explain to senators from places like Dakota why it is that huge pay-outs are being demanded for the safe release of US servicemen helping in a war in which there are few good guys and even less prospect of victory.

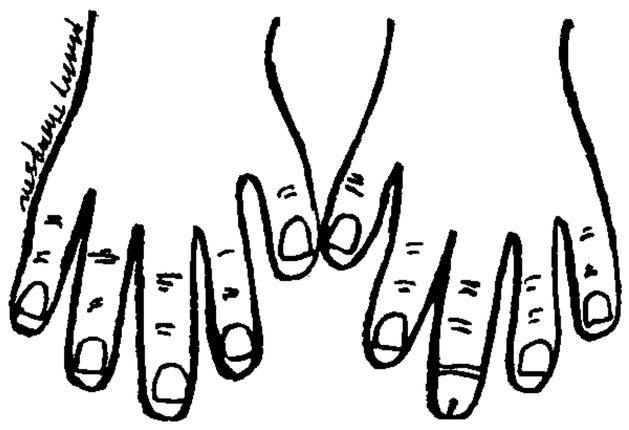
If Washington's fears on Plan Colombia increase, people like Mr Veléz may start to look a little less sure of themselves. But our rebels will also take great heart from such an apparent climbdown. With electricity pylons blown up across the country, the light, quite literally, is being turned out on us.

FUNNY OLD WORLD

COMPILED BY VICTOR LEWIS-SMITH

O "Not for the first time, we have made medical history," Dr Ivan Kuzanov told a press conference at the Tblisi Institute of Aesthetic and Reconstructive Plastic Surgery in Georgia. "The operation has been a total success, and I can now announce that our patient's amputated penis has been replaced with a fully-functioning substitute organ, made from pieces of grafted skin, some polystyrene, some goat gland, and one of his own fingers."

Dr Kuzanov then gave details of the pioneering operation, which was carried out on a sixty-year-old man whose original penis had been lost to cancer. "First we



amputated the middle finger of his left hand, and took skin grafts from his right forearm to shape and bind it in place. We turned the finger inside out, to create a channel for urination, but left the bone inside to provide rigidity when needed. The goat gland was the most difficult to graft, but we managed. Twelve days after the operation in December, the man was able to pass water and he has already resumed a full sex life. He is not married, but has two girlfriends, who are very satisfied with the results. Now that we have the technology, this operation will be available to Georgians at a cost of about $5,000, which is a huge sum for them. But foreigners who wish to have a penis-finger fitted can expect to pay ten times as much. Fair's fair." *(Deutsche Presse-Agentur, 15/2/01. Spotter: Andrew Baume)*

— O —

O "The Taipei Mass Rapid Transport Company is dedicated to providing citizens with cheap and reliable trains, and we cannot allow our operations to be disrupted by a few selfish individuals. Therefore, those who dare to inconvenience others by throwing themselves onto the track in an attempt to commit suicide are hereby warned that they will be liable to a fine not exceeding 50,000 Taiwan dollars.

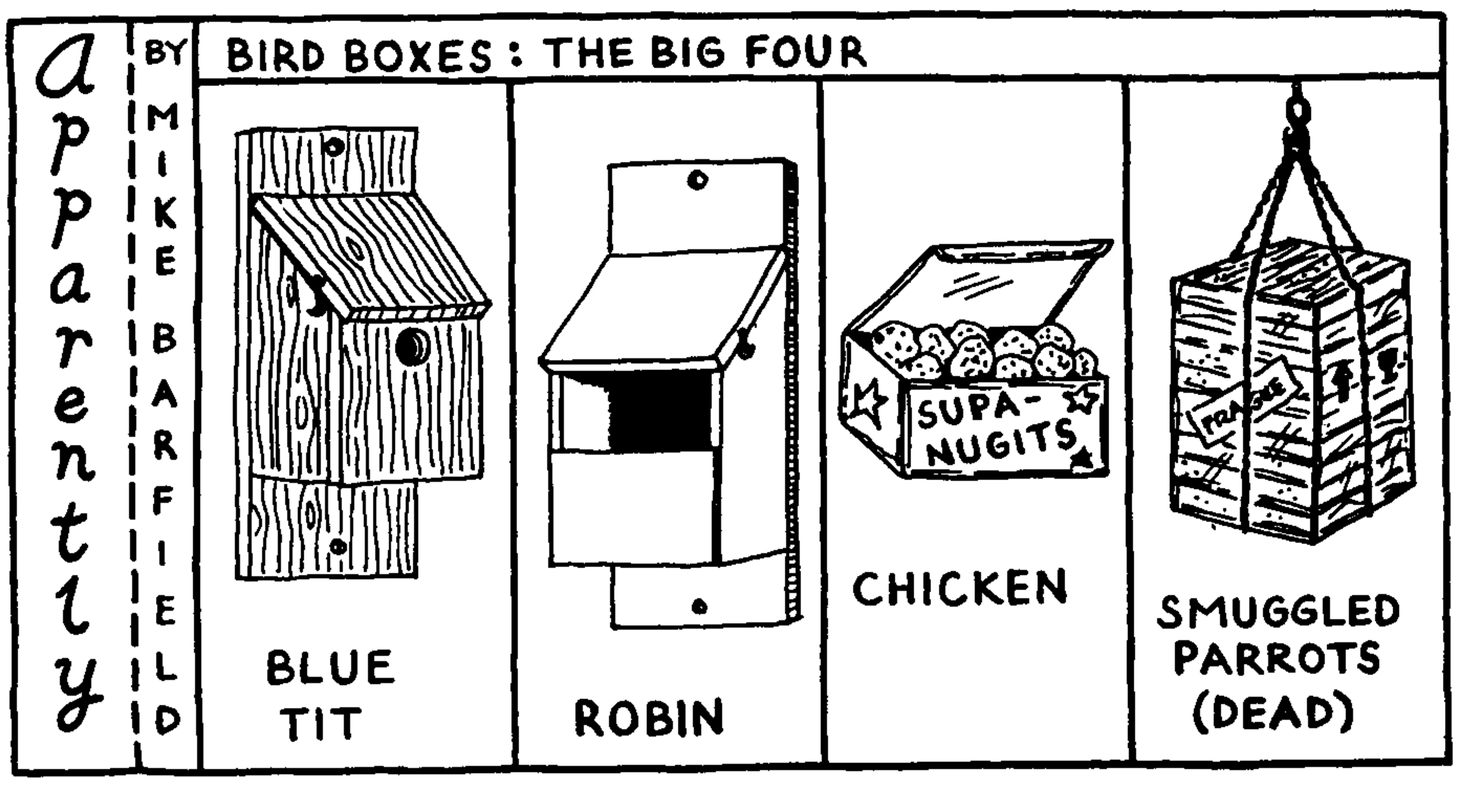
"The company is issuing this announcement due to the dozens of suicide attempts which have been made on its tracks in recent months. Taiwan has one of the highest suicide rates in Asia, second only to Japan. An average of six people commit suicide each day, but we ask them to show consideration by choosing methods that do not affect other people. In recent months, there have been up to four cases each day of people jumping in front of speeding trains on the mass rapid transit lines, and these incidents are leading to unacceptable delays. Furthermore, many of our track workers have acquired stains on expensive shoes which just won't come out, and our train drivers have become haunted by mental pictures of the suicides flashing before their eyes, and have had to change jobs. This has further affected the service, which is why we have reluctantly introduced the fines. By Order, The Taipei Mass Rapid Transport Company." *(Bangkok Post, 11/2//01. Spotter: D.A. Wayte)*

— O —

O *"The problem in there is horrendous," a female postal worker told reporters outside the Royal Mail sorting office in Blackburn. "You have people coming up to you and just breaking wind next to you. It's a disgusting problem, because you are working in such close proximity and it is such a male dominated environment. I would have thought it would have been a matter of common decency not to do it. Those people who won't control themselves should be sacked."*

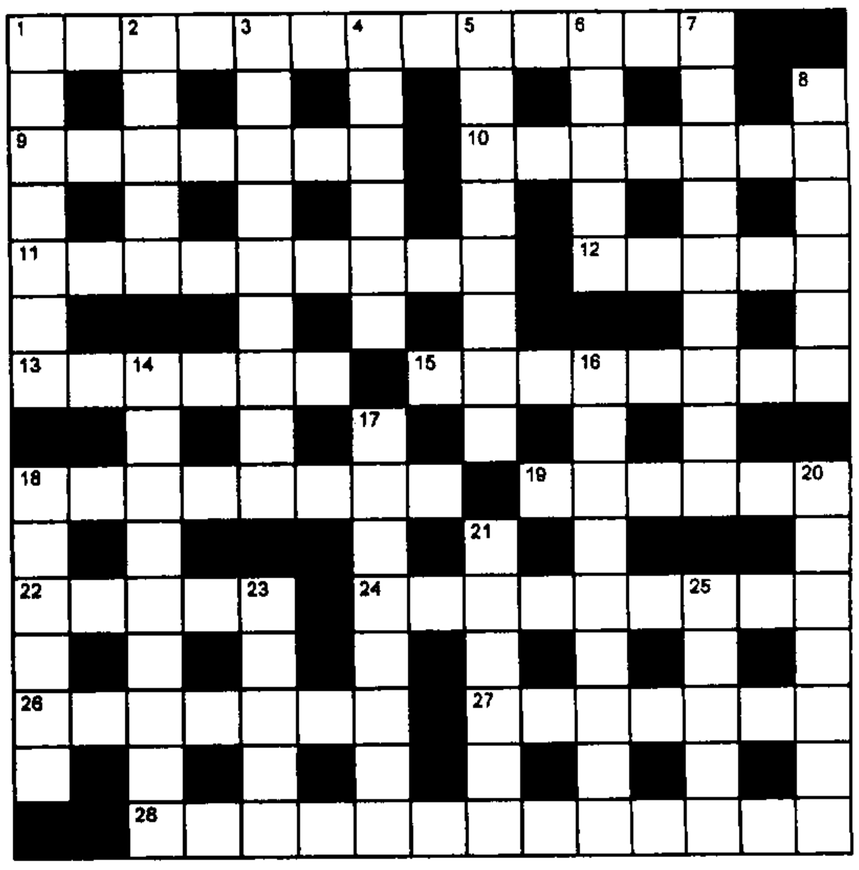
Staff were speaking anonymously to reporters after the Royal Mail (now Consignia) issued a formal notice, warning staff not to break wind on duty, and stating that it could constitute harassment. One male worker complained, "This problem has only arisen since they started employing women in the office, and they started complaining about colleagues breaking wind. I know of several employees who have been cautioned as a result, and it's not fair. Some people have weak sphincters, and could do themselves an injury if they try to hold it in. Wherever you be, let your wind go free, that's my motto."

Joseph Mulderig, an employment law specialist, drew attention to a recent test case in Ireland, in which a female member of staff successfully took her employer to an industrial tribunal, claiming constructive dismissal after he had failed to take action over a colleague's habit of breaking wind. "I'm not aware of anyone having been sacked for this reason, but there's bound to be a test case sooner or later." (Lancashire Evening Telegraph, 1/3/01. Spotter: Anthony Mullen)



EYE CROSSWORD 180

by Cyclops *£100 prize*



ACROSS

1 The old man twice occupying the Northern box carriage in drag (4,2,3,4)
9 Showed signs of VD: nice round succeeding point (7)
10 Revered personage gets to wallop court in a manner of speaking (7)
11 See 14 Down
12 See 14 Down
13 Problem at first getting Levis around abdominal area? (6)
15 Disgustingly – yes, extremely – soused, he took out my organ (8)
18 Strange, Becks' butt not likely to be featured in *Hello* (8)
19 One who rubs point on Pinter's topless other half (6)
22 Honest-to-goodness male coming beneath Brenda (5)
24 Said to get a confession from a suspected flasher? (3,4,2)
26 Whip on Brown, reportedly: "Drop-out" (7)
27 Cook, Robin seizing Amnesty International's capital (7)
28 Rumour-spreader needs daily scrub first (4,9)

DOWN

1 To hacks, having a hard-on amounts to exercise (5-2)
2 It's Bush's idea Zaire actually is primarily an island (5)
3 Not looking yourself, pissed, noticing sod all (9)
4 Topless, passionate, flipping romantic partner gets so far (2,4)
5 Old dear's mistaken duck for Auntie's turkey (8)
6 Give a bit of stick to Cook (5)
7 Engorged with passion, getting head – a quality of the upright citizen? (9)
8 One-time women-only second city (6)
14/12/11 In the way of a willing victim of Brown's desperate measures? (4,1,4,2,3,9)
16 Classy, very short virgins, surprisingly enduring (9)
17 Not at a loss as regards where to prod your balls? (2,6)
18 Peel's international body taking on outlaw Roy to a point (6)
20 Hot-headed, holding tit out, coming out with "Like some arse?" (7)
21 Like Schoenberg screwed Lana, taking time out initially (6)
23 Spotty things act out a mythical kingly character (5)
25 Fuss when house agent started suppressing ejaculation (3-2)

£100 prize to first solution opened on 12.4.01. Entries to 'Crossword', Private Eye, 6 Carlisle Street, London W1D 3BN.

Solution to Crossword No. 179

Winner: MIKE RANSHAW

ACROSS: 1/10 Pocket billiards 4 Glanced 9 Roger 11 Yorkist 12 Graphic 14 Ousts 16 Ugly as sin 18 Party whip 21 Riposte 23 Eyedrop 25/20 Brahms and Liszt 26 Ascot 27 Toolkit 28 Okayed.

DOWN: 1 Party pooper 2 Cigar 3 Earwigs 4 Gulag 5 Ali Baba 6 Cirrhosis 7 Dis 8 A bit much 13 Constipated 15 Strappado 17 Lip-reads 19 Yashmak 20 Lie back 22 Exact 24 Rocky 25 But.

ST ALBION PARISH NEWS

Incumbent: Rev. A.R.P. Blair MA (Oxon)

Hi, everyone,

I hope you've all been enjoying your hot cross buns and your Easter bunnies!

Well, let me tell you, your Vicar is one very hot and cross bunny indeed at the moment. (Thanks to Mr O'Farrell for that one!)

But, seriously, I'm going to have to read the riot act this week over the way some people have been treating Mr Vaz (or Keith, as he is known to his good friends in the parish). No wonder he has been taken ill and I hope you are all ashamed of yourselves.

Keith, as you know, has made an absolutely invaluable contribution to the life of the parish in so many ways.

Let's not forget that he was the first Indian member of the PCC. (Shame on us for taking so long!) And what a positive signal that sent out, showing everyone that, when it comes to making parish appointments, we choose people irrespective of race, colour, creed or ability!

But certain people can't seem to be able to find it in their hearts to welcome people from other climes into our community on equal terms!

Goodness me, the stories that are being put around about Mr Vaz!

If you believed half of them, you'd think that Keith had done something wrong.

For instance, it has been claimed that he was seen taking money out of the collection plate and putting it in his own pocket during the Offertory hymn, whenever everyone was busy singing "What a friend we have in Tony".

Can I just make it clear that there is absolutely no record of this at all!

I personally arranged for Mrs Filkins to carry out a full investigation of all these charges against Keith.

And although, sadly, he was too busy on parish business down at the passport ofice to see her himself, Mrs Filkins nevertheless came to exactly the same conclusion as I had already done – that Keith, just like Peter before him, was innocent of any charge.

Well done, Mrs Filkins and your good

ladies! So, let's have no more silly, hurtful tittle-tattle about Keith, shall we?

Instead, I'd like to take this opportunity to remember all the good things he has done for the parish since he joined our team.

Unfortunately, there isn't space to list all his many achievements. But one stands out in particular.

And that was the selfless help he gave to local businessmen like the Hinduja brothers (Gotricha, Bakhanda and Boforsguna) who were having trouble with their passport applications.

Keith could not have done more to guide them through all the difficulties of filling in their forms, and he even asked me personally to put my signature on the back of their photographs.

And didn't it turn out well! The good brothers were so grateful that they quite coincidentally sent a very generous cheque for our Millennium Tent Appeal, which helped to make it such a huge success!

So, I would just liked to end by recording my complete faith in Mr Vaz and expressing my very deep personal sadness at the news, which he has yet to hear, that he will have to stand down after next month's PCC elections, in order to spend more time with his family.

Yours, Tony

Upcoming Parish Dates

St Albion's Voodoo Society

■ Mr Reinaldo da Silva (Mr Mandelson's partner) will give a short talk on how to bring a curse on your enemies with the aid of a strangled chicken. Parishioners are warned **not** to try this one at home except under proper supervision by a qualified witch dosctor. Admission free.

Kids Corner

This picture (taken a few years ago!) shows a well-known parish personality when he was a student at a well-known university!

Is it a) Donny Osmond; b) David Cassidy; c) one of the Monkees; d) Rev. A.R.P. Blair MA (Oxon)?

A prize of the Millennium Tent (plus fridge, slightly rusty) will go to the first correct entry opened.

MILLENNIUM TENT

SPECIAL OFFER

STILL FOR SALE

at a giveaway price (0p), this unique memento of our parish millennium celebrations still has not found a good home! Couldn't some kind person please offer to take the tent off our hands? It is currently becoming a bit of an eyesore, since various parishioners decided to use it as a dump and someone has thrown an old fridge on top of it. All offers gratefully accepted (except, of course, P-Y Gerbil who made such a mess of our otherwise successful tent project!).

AN OFFICIAL WARNING FROM MR BYERS,

PCC BUSINESS LIAISON OFFICER

ANYONE who bought copies of a book called *The Paymaster* by Tom Bower at last week's Bring-and-Buy sale may have committed a criminal offence.

They must at all costs return the book to me without reading it, or face prosecution. S.B.

A New Easter Hymn

There is a green hill far away
Beyond the city wall.
So go out now and visit it,
But stay in your car, that's all!

Words and music by
"Ramblin' Mike" Meacher 2001

Parish Postbag

Dear Sir,

I would just like to thank everyone who organised the recent party to celebrate my retirement after more than 50 years' service to the parish.

I look back on many happy times under previous incumbents, but I am only sorry that, since the arrival of the present Vicar, with his

Yours fraternally,
Tony Benn, The Old Teabag, Tetley Road, PGT 1PS

The Editor reserves the right to cut all letters due to foot-and-mouth restrictions. A.C.

FOOT AND MOUTH EPIDEMIC 'ON THE WANE' Says Campbell

by Our Political Staff **Phil Grave**

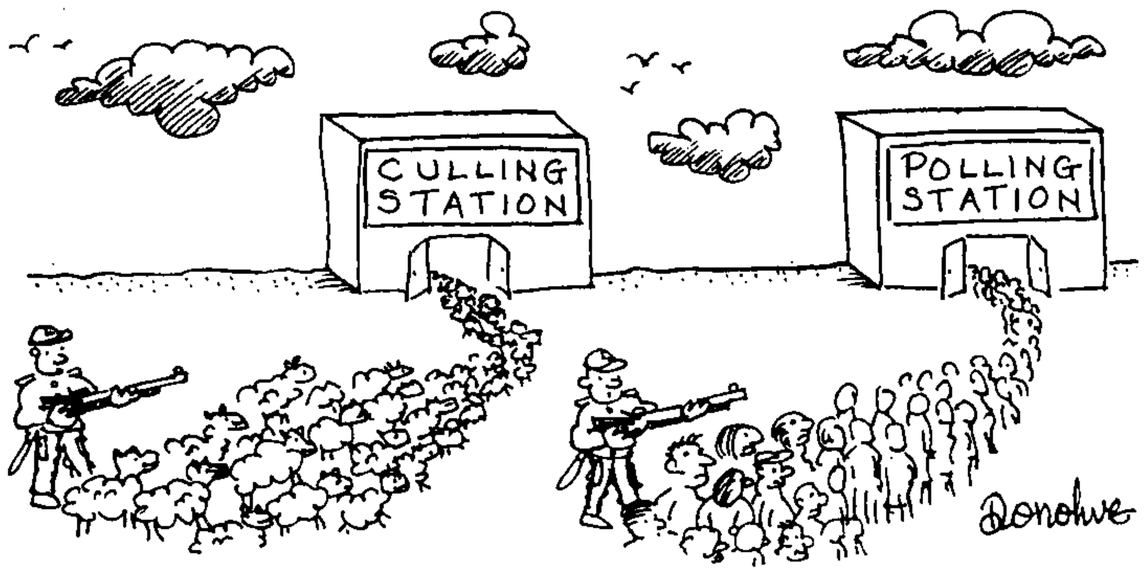
A DRAMATIC decrease in the number of Foot and Mouth stories appearing in the newspapers has led experts to believe that the crisis may be over.

"Only a week ago," said a spokesman, "we thought FMD was uncontrollable. It had spread to almost every page of every newspaper in the country with horrendous pictures of burning sheep and weeping farmers.

"In the last week, however," he continued, "there has been a steady and gratifying reversal in the trend. Yesterday there were only two isolated stories, both in the Daily Telegraph. One was on page 7 underneath a colour feature on the Milan fashion show, in which top model Nargetta Nudi revealed she had been stung by an Italian bee whilst modelling Stella Macartstudent's latest design.

The other, slightly less serious, was squashed next to a ten-page supplement on the inside story of Bridget Jones's Diary."

Mr Alastair Campbell went on the record to tell journalists "Everything points to the FMD story being firmly under control by June 7th, when it will once again be safe to call the election."



SOPHIE HOAX SHOCK

LEARN TO SWIM THE BARRYMORE WAY

We regret to say that this educational strip has been omitted due to pressures of space.

THE BRITISH CONSTITUTION AT WORK

by **Vernon Bogstandard** and **Ben Pimlotofrubbish**

UNDER the British Constitution, if the Prime Minister wishes to dissolve Parliament and call an election, he must apply formally to the highest authority in the land – the editor of the Sun – a historic post that is currently occupied by Mr David Yelland, Yob-in-Waiting to His Royal Highness the Digger King, Emperor of Sun and Sky.

In olden times, the Prime Minister would travel by coach to Wapping for an audience with the editor. Now he is more likely to seek permission from Mr Yelland by telephone or perhaps e-mail.

Once permission is granted for an election, the Prime Minister will publish an official bulletin on the front page of the Sun with the traditional formula of the headline 'Yes! It's June 7th' (or similar), accompanied by a short proclamation along the lines of 'Kill a sheep and win the election'.

Only then will the Prime Minister announce the date to the rest of the media. His final constitutional task will be to inform the monarch and then if he can be bothered, he might mention the election in the House of Commons (time permitting).

POETRY CORNER

The Poet Laureate, ***Andrew Motion****, has written a brand new poem especially for Private Eye on the subject of the tragic outbreak of Foot and Mouth Disease.*

They are burning the sheep
And the cows and all
The other animals.
Isn't it awful?

You see it on the
Television night after
Night.

It makes you
Think about young
Women with
No clothes on.

So you go up to
Your computer in
The spare room.

And start sending
Off some dirty
E-mails to
Your students.

As the poet said,
April is the
Cruellest month.

Because that's when the
Story comes out in
The papers.

© Andrew Goingthroughthemotions

A Doctor writes

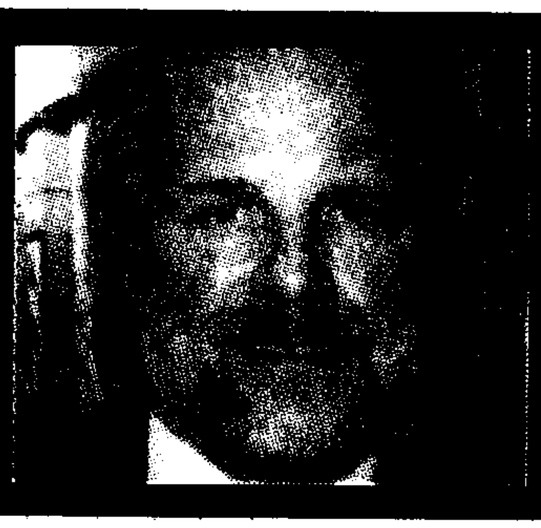
PATIENTS often come to me and say, "Doctor, I am about to get the sack. Can you help me?"

The simple answer is "yes". I tell the patient that he is suffering from a great deal of stress and is suffering daily attacks by the press. These have left him weak and vulnerable and his career is liable to collapse at any minute. This condition is what we doctors call *Pseudo Vazcularitis* or *Saunders Syndrome*, as it is known to us lawyers. What I usually recommend is that the patient tells everyone that he must rest until he is sure that the election is over.

If you are worried about being sacked for being a bit of a crook, why not visit our website — www.vaznet.con.uk

© A Spin Doctor

"My shares have got FTSE & Mouth"



IS THIS THE SON OF BIRT?

IN A sensational new £8 million landmark documentary series to be shown on Sundays throughout the Easter period, the BBC will take a radical new look at the most important and influential figure in world history – Greg Dyke.

Using the latest computer-imaging technology, experts have painstakingly assembled the most accurate image ever known of the man who, believers claim, is the saviour of the BBC.

Says Professor Botney, of the White City Institute for Men With Beards, "It is an extraordinary experience to find oneself confronted by this charismatic personality who altered the course of human civilisation by moving the news to 10 o'clock.

THE BIRT OF OUR LORD

"We can clearly see at last," he said, "a simple man who wandered about performing no miracles and who was crucified for losing snooker to Sky Sports 4. Truly, this man was the son of Birt."

Daily Mail APOLOGY

IN RECENT decades, in common with all other Conservative newspapers, we may have given the impression that market forces are the only regulator of the British economy, that sectors facing ruin such as mining or ship building should receive no special treatment in the form of subsidies from the public purse, and that if those industries weren't allowed to go to the wall it would be a disaster for the British economy.

We now realise, in the light of the foot and mouth outbreak, that market forces are no regulator of the British economy, and that a sector such as farming must receive special treatment in the form of massive subsidies from the public purse, and that if such an industry were to go to the wall then it would be a disaster for Britain.

We apologise for any confusion this may have caused.

ON OTHER PAGES • Did Asylum Seekers Bring in Foot and Mouth?

NURSERY TIMES

Friday April 6 2001

FOOT-AND-MOUTH TRACED TO MARY'S LITTLE LAMB

by **Little Boy Brown**

TOP VETS today announced that they believe the horrifying spread of FMD may be due to the movements of one lamb belonging to a girl called Mary.

"The pattern of the new outbreak is consistent with the path of the lamb as it criss-crossed the country following Mary.

"Everywhere that Mary went," said the vet, "FMD was sure to go."

Cow Splashes Down — No One Hurt

by **Bel-Over-The-Mooney**

SPACE station Moo returned to earth today in a disappointing climax to its mission to orbit the moon.

The elderly cow splashed down in the Pacific after disintegrating as it re-entered the earth's atmosphere. Only a few observers watched the last minutes of the cow's descent. Said a little dog, "Ha ha ha ha ha! I haven't seen such fun in years."

A dish, tracking Moo's final trajectory, fled the scene in terror and friends later reported that he was being comforted by a spoon.

But critics of the costly Moo Mission hit out at the ignominious end of the billion dollar experiment.

"We've been diddled," said a cat. "The whole thing is a fiddle."

On Other Pages

- *'How I lost my sheep and found that MAFF had killed them all' by Bo-Peep*
- *Old MacDonald to abandon farm and sell 'Big Issue'*
- *Woman in shoe gives child to gay couple*

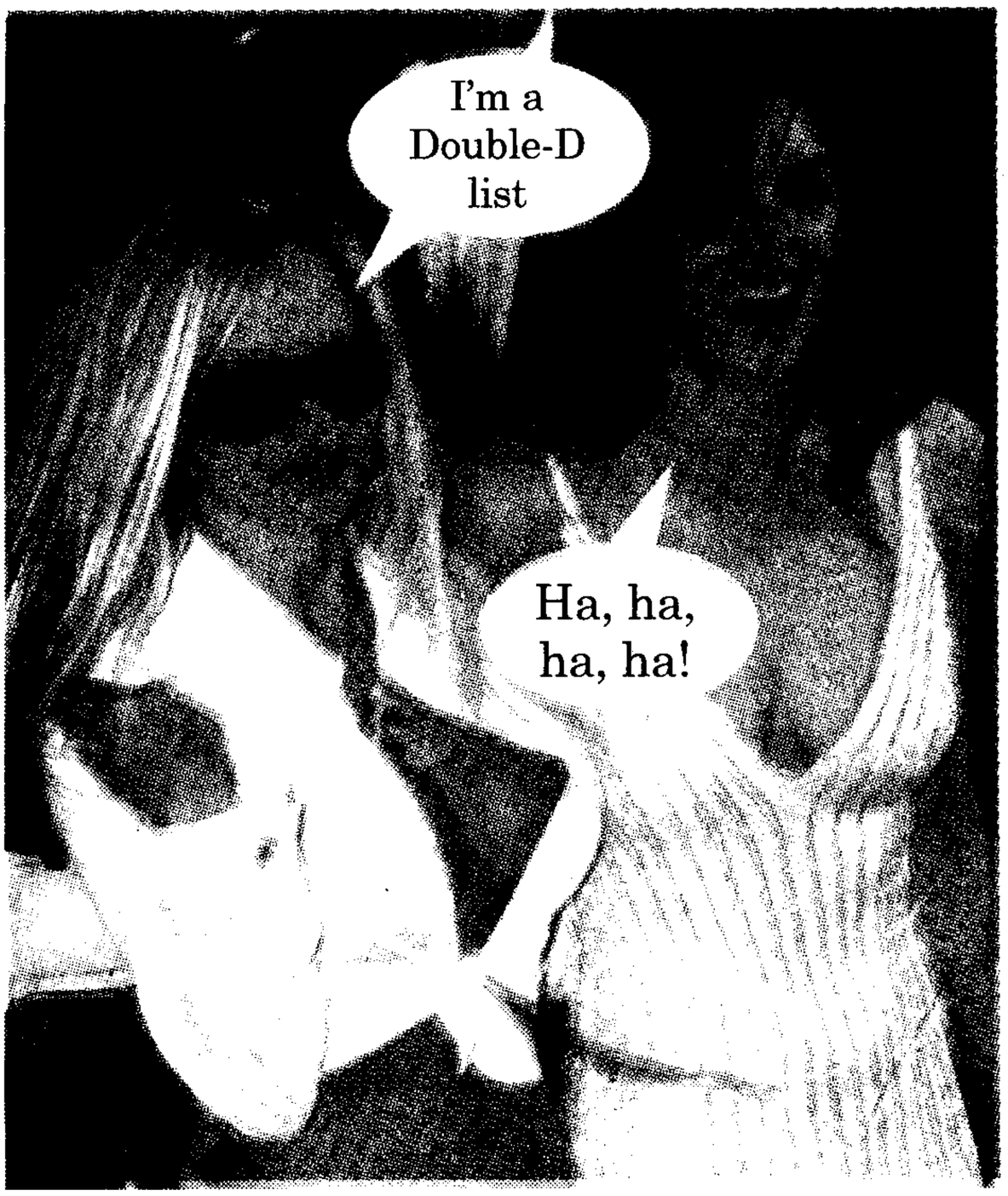
THE OSCARS BRITS SWEEP FLOOR

by Our Showbiz Staff

THE stars were out in force at last night's glittering Academy Awards ceremony, although many Brits were unable to receive their Oscars in person, because they sadly hadn't won anything.

One proud British onlooker said, "It was a great night for all our British nominees -- not only were they all invited to the awards ceremony itself, they were also allowed to rub shoulders with all the big American stars at the glamorous after-show parties – we should be proud that the Americans allowed them to come."

He continued, "And the Brits certainly swept the floor this year. British born Julio Martinez-Smith, 43, was one of only 3,000 immigrant workers who cleaned up after the big event!"



"Under the new Charter, elderly patients will not be treated differently by the NHS – they'll be treated just as badly as everyone else"

COURT CIRCULAR

WATERSTONE'S

Friday: Her Majesty The Queen will visit the Waterstone's bookshop in Piccadilly where she will meet representatives of the bookselling industry. Her Majesty will be welcomed by Mr Barry Boxwallah, head of marketing, who will ask Her Majesty whether she wishes to purchase a CD, DVD or video, or possibly a cafe latte, as the shop no longer sells much in the way of books, there not being much demand for them. Her Majesty will then visit the '8 Books or Less' checkout, where she will be introduced to Miss Sally Grummett, the Chief Sales Assistant (Media, Gardening and Gay Erotica). Her Majesty will ask for a copy of Mr Tom Bower's best-selling book *Geoffrey Robinson – What A Crook*, and will be informed that the book has been withdrawn on legal advice. Her Majesty will then be offered instead a signed copy of the current best-seller *Harry Potter And The Mountain Of Gold* by J.K. Rowlinginit.

BUCKINGHAM PALACE

Friday: HM The Queen will later host a small reception for 800 leading figures from the world of literature. She will enjoy not having heard of any of them, and will smile politely at Mr Salman Rushdie, Lord Barg of Southside, Dame Drabble of Drivel, Dame Beryl of Bainbridge, Sir John Walsh and the Lord Wheen (formerly Karl Marx). Her Majesty will ask each of them in turn "What do you do?" and they will provide suitably sycophantic replies such as "Good evening, Ma'am" and "Dick Francis is my favourite author too, Ma'am." Following the Queen's departure, the assembled writers will become seriously intoxicated before stumbling home to write an 800-word column on "How I Met The Queen" for their respective newspapers.

ROY of the VOLVOS
ENGLAND'S COACH FACES TWO BIG GAMES IN A WEEK
CAN WE STILL QUALIFY BOSS?
IF EVERYONE'S AS BAD AS US- YES
IT'S A TOUGH ASSIGNMENT....
ANOTHER WIN- WHAT'S YOUR SECRET?
THERE'S ONLY ONE NORMAN WISDOM
THE OPPOSITION ARE NOT VERY GOOD
BUT ENGLAND EMERGE TRIUMPHANT!
CAN YOU PICK US A WORLD CUP WINNING TEAM?
FOOTBALL'S COMING HOME... VIA STOCKHOLM!
YES- HOW ABOUT BRAZIL?
ROOPER

Ye Mediaeval Telegraph

Proprietor: Conrad Black Death FRIDAY APRIL 6 1348 One Groat

YE BLACK DEATHE UNDER CONTROL

Edward Ye Thyrd's Shocke Claime

YE KING of England today haſtened to reaſsure ye burghers, yeomen and serfs that ye so-called "Blacke Death" had reached its peak after ye deaths of two villeins in ye countie of Cumbria, and that ſoon ye countrie would be "back to normal".

Ye King urged ye populace to "go forth into ye country ſide and spend as many groats as ye can in ye olde gifte shoppes and way ſide taverns".

"For", quoth he, "the ſe good folke are suffering a grievous lacke of trade, and manie may go to ye wall unleſs they find cuſtom."

Saith one inne-keeper, Maſter Anglo-Saxon Balon of Ye Coach And Pair in ye village of Soho outside London, "Make no miſtake! I have not sold a single ploughman's lunch since Candlemass. I blame ye government."

Ye Cross-Head

It was ye same storie all over ye realm.

Ye muddie trackway of ye M1 was as emptie of ox-carts as ye desert ſ of Arabia, so we have heard. *(See woodcuts page four-and-ninety).*

Ye Stoppe Presse

Millions dead as plague sweeps Europe. *W.F. Deedes* reports.

TV Heilights

Channel Foührer

7.30 Science and The Nazis – Fascinating documentary about how the Nazis employed scientific advances to do really nasty things.

8.00 Sex and The Nazis – Fascinating documentary about how the Nazis did really nasty things in a sexy way.

9.00 The Nazis and The Nazis – Fascinating documentary showing how the Nazis were secret Nazi sympathisers and used their Nazism to do really scientific, sexy nasty things.

10.00 Channel 4 and The Nazis – Fascinating documentary showing how low desperate men will stoop to get viewers for their channel.

11.00 American Football and The Nazis – Live coverage from the Nuremburg Bowl *(That's enough Channel 4. Ed.)*

ME AND MY SPOON

THIS WEEK

DAME JUDI DENCH

You must have seen a good many spoons in your time, Dame Judi...

Oh yes, indeed. At my age it's almost inevitable, isn't it?

Does any particular spoon stand out?

I've seen so many wonderful spoons! I've been very, very lucky.

Would you say you were a spoon-person, then?

Oh, I think so, very definitely! Where would we be without them, I often wonder.

Is that an intuitive thing with you?

Yes and no. As an actress one works so much with instinct. You get a feeling about something, and then you have to go with it.

Are spoons important to you outside your life on the stage?

That's a tricky one. And so often it's difficult to separate one from the other. Aren't we all of us just actors playing a part?

Do you have any particular tips for keeping spoons clean?

When I was in rep, we used to soak them overnight in salt water, I remember. But one hasn't got time for that sort of thing these days.

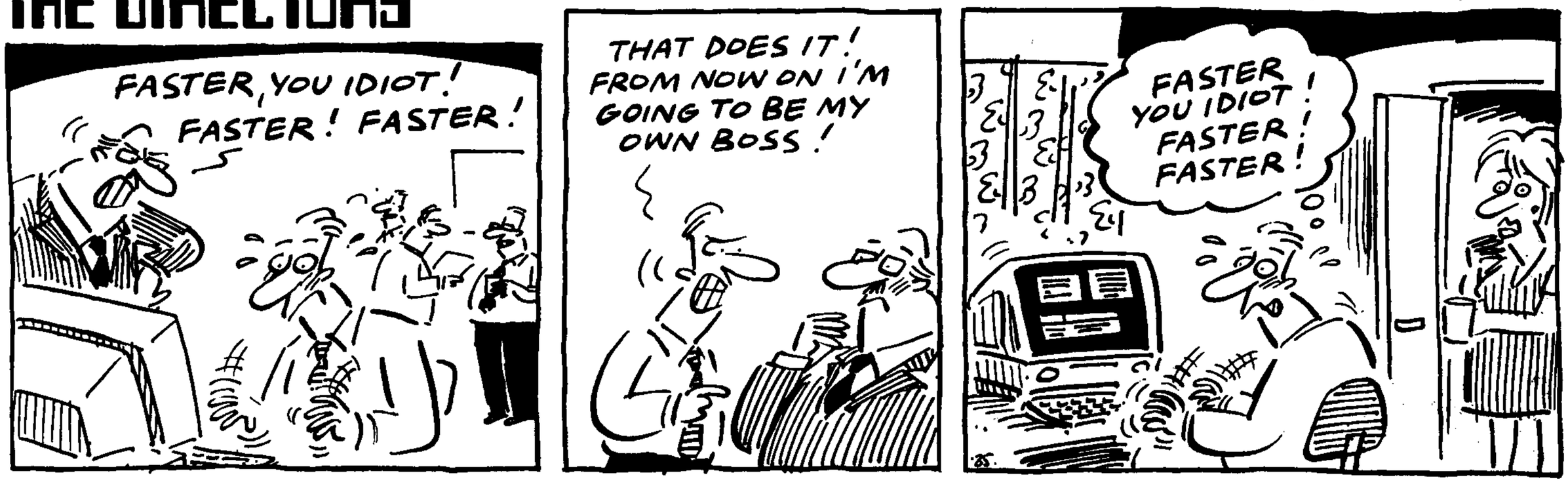
Has anything amusing ever happened to you in connection with a spoon?

No.

STARTING NEXT WEEK: Me and My Watch Strap with Sir David Attenborough.

THE DIRECTORS

DREDGE/RIGG



FOOT-AND-MOUTH SPECIAL

BLAIR CALLS FOR EMERGENCY VACILLATION

by Our Foot-And-Mouth Staff
Simon Heffer and the late **Larry Lamb**

IN AN amazing U-turn, the Government today decided to introduce an immediate vacillation strategy for all ministers and officials in charge of the foot-and-mouth crisis.

"Our new policy," said Mr Blair, "is to travel to all parts of the country where there are TV cameras and be filmed telling people that the crisis is under control and that there is no reason to cancel the election.

"On the other hand," he said, "we have to accept that the crisis is out of control and that we may have to postpone the election."

Vets were last night warning that vacillation was not the answer.

"There is no evidence," they said, "that vacillation is effective in the long-term, even if it seems to offer a quick fix to politicians who haven't got the slightest idea what to do."

THE BEST IS VET TO COME

But Blair was adamant that vacillation was the only course left. "It has always worked for me in the past, and there is no reason why it shouldn't work this time.

"On second thoughts," he concluded, "perhaps it won't, or there again it might. The crucial thing is to keep an open mind, and just to wait and see."

'KEEP OUT OF THE TOWN' PLEADS PRIME MINISTER

by Our Political Staff

MILLIONS of countryfolk were last night advised by the Prime Minister to stay out of London so long as "the present difficulties continue".

"London," Mr Blair warned, "is a 'no-go area', thanks to the epidemic of striking which has brought all underground trains to a standstill.

"There is no cause for alarm," he continued. "Mr Brown has got this crisis firmly under control. It is just that, at the moment, there aren't any tubes running and the streets are full of people running amok and shouting 'Where are all the bloody buses?'"

DOWN THE TUBES

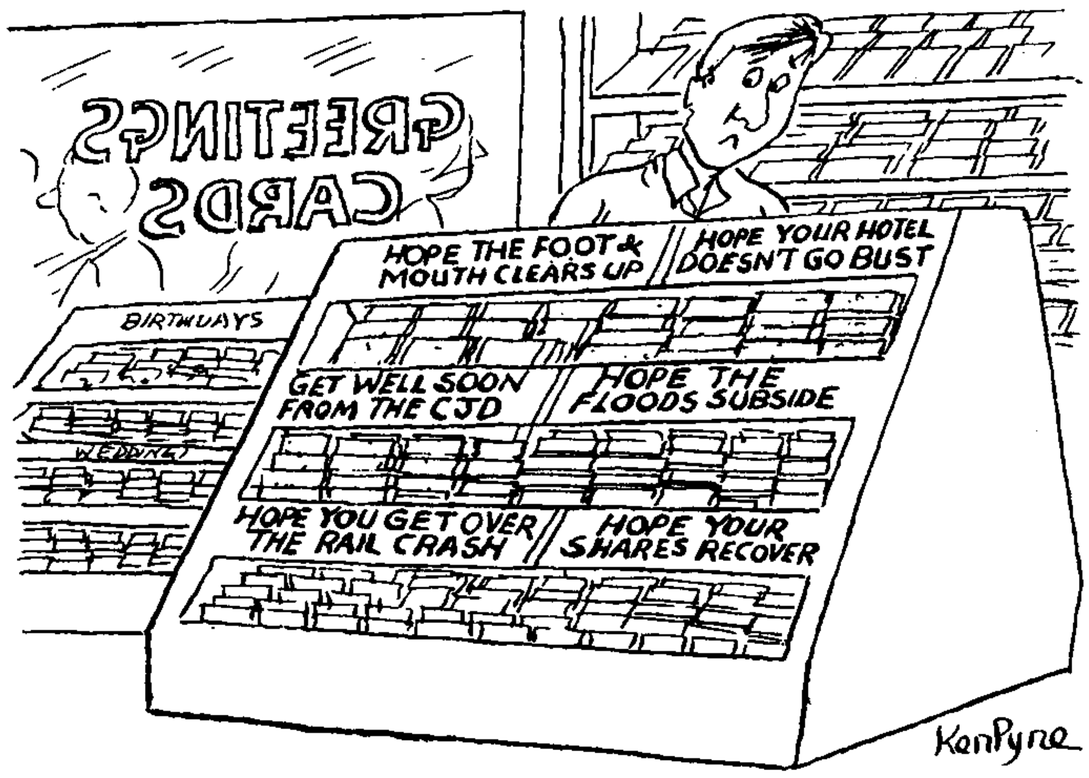
Mr Blair later issued a clarification of his earlier statement, advising that country people should come to London to support the urban economy.

"We want as many people as possible to come up to the capital to stay in hotels, eat at restaurants and go shopping.

"The message," he said, "is that you can go anywhere and do anything so long as you don't try to travel around."

The Prime Minister is understood to have ordered Mr Brown to go for vaccination amid mounting concern in Downing Street about his handling of the crisis.

Daily Mail



That Chinese Takeaway Pigswill Meal In Full

Sour And Sour Pork

— ❋ —

Special Fried Sheep

— ❋ —

Beef In Large Trench

— ❋ —

Very Hot Lamb In Mass Gravy

— ❋ —

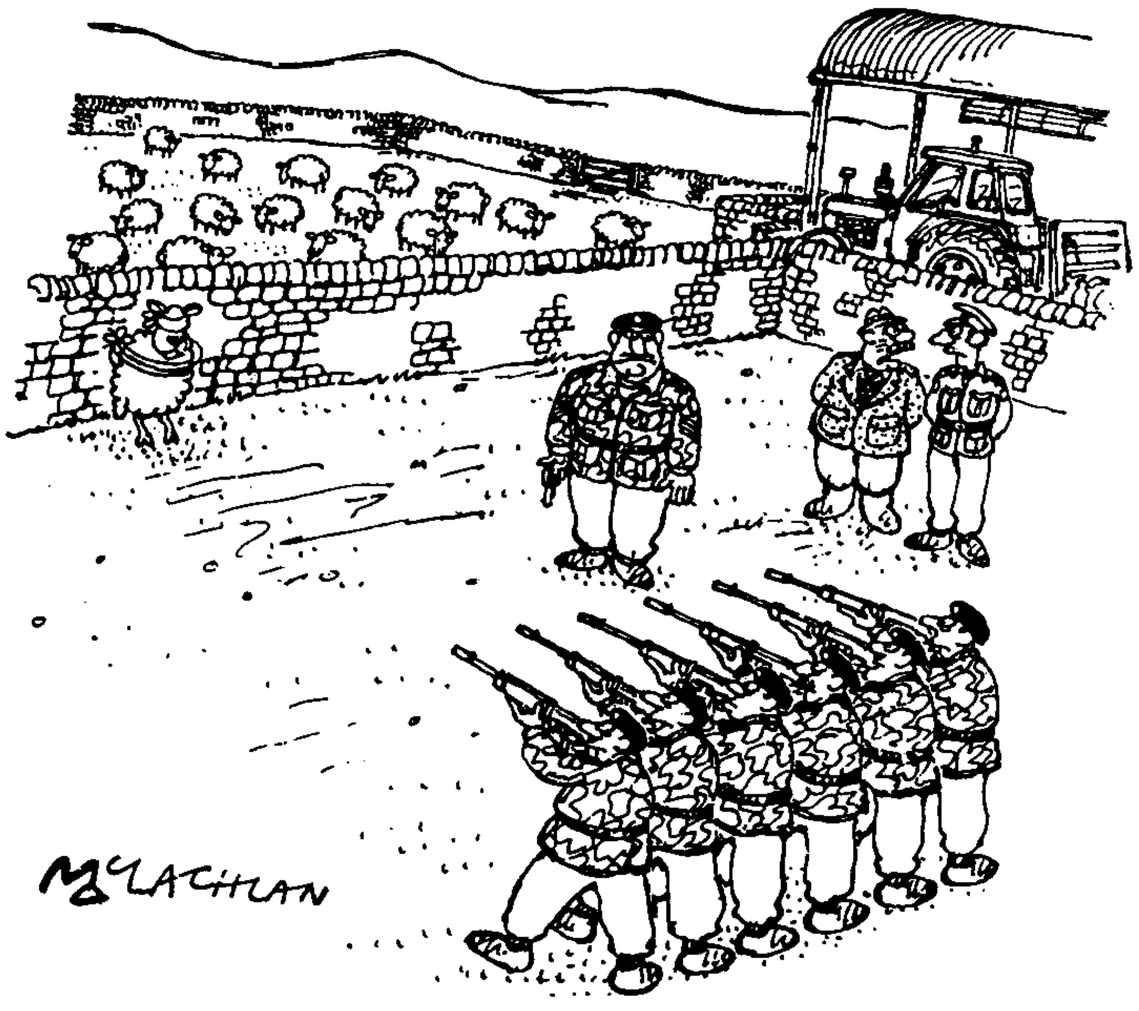
Sore Sauce

— ❋ —

Egg Foo-Tan-Mouth

— ❋ —

Note: Everything out-of-wok. No spring polls.



"I just thought that bringing in the Army would help to speed things up"

'MAXWELL WAS A BIT OF A CROOK'

DTI Reports Shock Finding

by Our City Staff **Phil Boots**

THE entire financial world was rocked to its foundations when, after nine years trawling through old copies of Private Eye, the Department of Trade and Industry finally produced its report into the business dealings of the late Robert Maxwell.

The seven-hundred-page, £8 million report concludes that Mr Maxwell was a "bit dodgy".

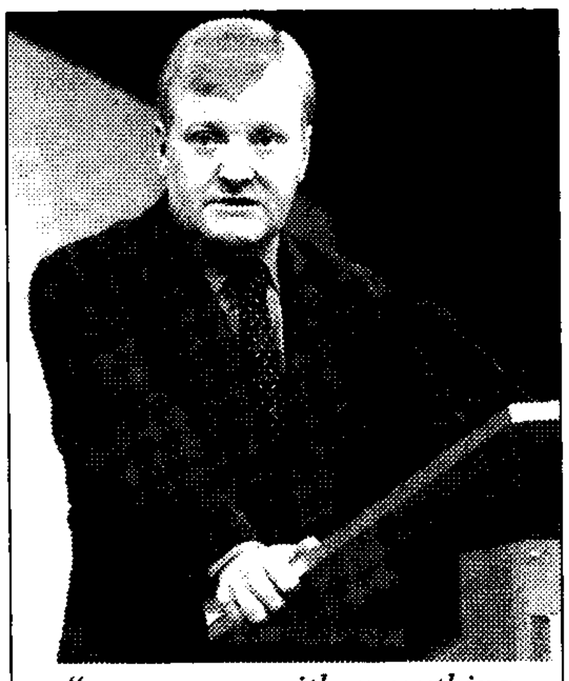
It then goes on to criticise those who worked with Mr Maxwell – lawyers, accountants, bankers and politicians – for failing to recognise that when he ordered them to steal money from his employees' pension funds this might constitute conduct that was "less than wholly ethical".

The report concludes that, since many of Mr Maxwell's associates are now either in prison or in the government, it would be inappropriate to criticise them further.

Helen Liddell is 55.

How Opposition Works

"We Lib-Dems are the radical alternative to Labour..."



"...we agree with everything they say!"

News Round-Up

BBC IN DEATHBED CONFESSION

JUST before its death, the BBC recorded a final interview in which "Auntie", as she was known, confessed that she was on her last legs. She apologised for some of the terrible things she had done.

"That interview with Reggie Kray was unforgiveable," she said. "We should never have shot it. We've got away with murder."

ELECTORS WANT HAGUE CANCELLED

A LARGE majority of voters now think that William Hague should "be cancelled".

"Now is not the right time," said a spokesman, "to have a William Hague.

"Things are bad enough at the moment without having to worry about a William Hague. They should forget about Hague until such a time as we have a proper leader of the opposition."

GEORGE BOOZE BACK ON THE PUBLICITY

THE former football star Mr George Booze ***(cont. pint 94)***

POETRY CORNER

Lines on the raising of the Bluebird from the depths of Coniston Water

So. Hullo again
Donald Campbell.
After we had said
Farewell to you
Thirty-two years
Ago.

Not that I was around
Personally,
But Keith's mum
Remembers seeing it on
The Pathe
News.

E.J. Thribb (17½)

BIRD CAGE, for sale. £10 ono. Will suit buggery guards or Canneries

Brighton Argus

HEATH'S PRIVATE VIEW

STANLEY SPENCER AT TATE BRITAIN
NO. NOT TATE MODERN THAT'S THE OTHER SIDE OF THE RIVER!
HE COULD PAINT AND DRAW, HE WOULDN'T STAND A CHANCE IN TODAY'S ART MARKET
HE HAD A WIFE CALLED HILDA, BUT HE HAD A THING ABOUT PATRICIA PREECE WHO IT TURNED OUT WAS LESBIAN HE WAS SO MODERN..
..SO NOW!
MAYBE HE JUST NEEDED COUNSELLING
I DON'T WANT TO HEAR ALL THAT! I GET ME A BUST REDUCTION CLINIC! FAST!
WOMEN! CAN'T LIVE WITH THEM, CAN'T LIVE WITHOUT THEM
AT THE CORE OF HIS VISION IS THE BELIEF THAT EVERY MATERIAL THING... ..MUST BE ULTIMATELY REDEEMED...
CATALOGUE
WHAT CAN I WRITE ABOUT HIM THAT WILL MAKE ME SEEM INTERESTING, IN THIS WEEKS SUNDAY....
FAMOUS FOR HIS SEXUAL FRANKNESS... MEN! THEY MAKE ME SICK! THEY ALL WANT THEIR CAKE AND EAT IT!
HEATH

DIARY

JOHN PEEL, broadcaster: He preceded punk, by coming before it. I think his greatest legacy is that he made it possible for people who can't sing to make records. He opened the door to impenetrable lyrics and songs that didn't contain their title. He was the first person to do that. And he didn't used to shave, still doesn't for all I know. Up until that time, you either had to be clean-shaven or grow a beard, but he chose to walk a tight-rope somewhere in the middle between shaving and not-shaving. I met him once, sometime in the late-Sixties, either here or somewhere in America. He was a fairly likeable sort of guy, from what I remember of the episode, which frankly isn't much.

SARAH, DUCHESS OF YORK: Dylan? He's my man! Wooh! I totally love all his songs totally, but my absolutely bestest, most favouritest Dylan song is "My Way". It says everything I've ever felt – talk about strumming my life with his fingers, and killing me softly with his whoopsy (naughty! Sarah's put her foot in it again! Prince Philip will have another of his tantrums! Big smack!). Seriously, those lines "I've lived a life that's rich, I've travelled each and every highway. But more, much more than this, I did it My Way" – well, Bob could have been writing them with me in mind. Now I've started to blub. I've let out my heart. I'm just too warm and open, that's my trouble.

YOKO ONO, artist, composer, philosopher, musician, poet, world citizen: A lot of people still don't understand that we wrote his first five albums together, and I played mouth-organ on them for him. Our fans, who we love, prefer some of our more famous songs, like "Hard Rain" or "The Times They Are A-Changin", but my own favourite is, "The Beautiful, Beautiful Yoko," which Bob still hasn't recorded. It's a song that's very true. It says it all.

TONY BLAIR, Prime Minister: Bob Dylan is truly a man of our age. Creative. Compassionate. Forward-looking. With his guitar and his mouth-organ he sings of old-fashioned values in a wholly modern setting. From his songs, we learn some of the oldest lessons of all – lessons like the importance of a public-private partnership in a fast-changing world and value-for-money for the consumer. Look, I'm a normal family bloke. I enjoy taking off my jacket and picking up my guitar

BOB DYLAN AT (NEARLY) 60 – AN EARLY BIRTHDAY TRIBUTE

and having a bit of a strum and a sing-song with the family as much as the next guy. My favourite Dylan song? "You Gotta Serve Somebody". It might sound kinda funny, but I've always felt that when he sang about "somebody" it's as if he was, you know, singing about me.

NED SHERRIN, broadcaster: Mr Dylan, indeed! I believe it was the late Hermione Gingold of immortal memory who once recalled that dear Coral Browne, bless her, had once found herself sitting in a London taxi-cab beside the legendary Margaret Courtenay who told her that she had once acted opposite Dame Edith Evans, no less, in a production of *Daft About Daffodils* at what was then the Lyric Theatre, and Dame Edith had pulled herself up to her fullest height and said in that delicious voice of hers that she had once had occasion to bump – quite literally! – into the great Maggie Smith, who was then performing her acclaimed Lady Turnbull in *Over to You, Jemima* at The Old Vic and found occasion to remember the singularly wicked time when she encountered the late, great Sybil Thorndike with John Gielgud in of all extraordinary places the lift at Selfridges, and she said, in that inimitable voice, "I say" What are YOU doing here!" and she said, "I believe it was the late Hermione Gingold of immortal memory who once recalled the late Coral Browne, bless her –". But where were we? Ah, yes! Mr Robert Dylan, of that parish! If memory serves, he once dropped the most almighty brick upon being introduced to Yvonne Arnaud – the exact ramifications of which, in all their delicious detail, I forget! Priceless!

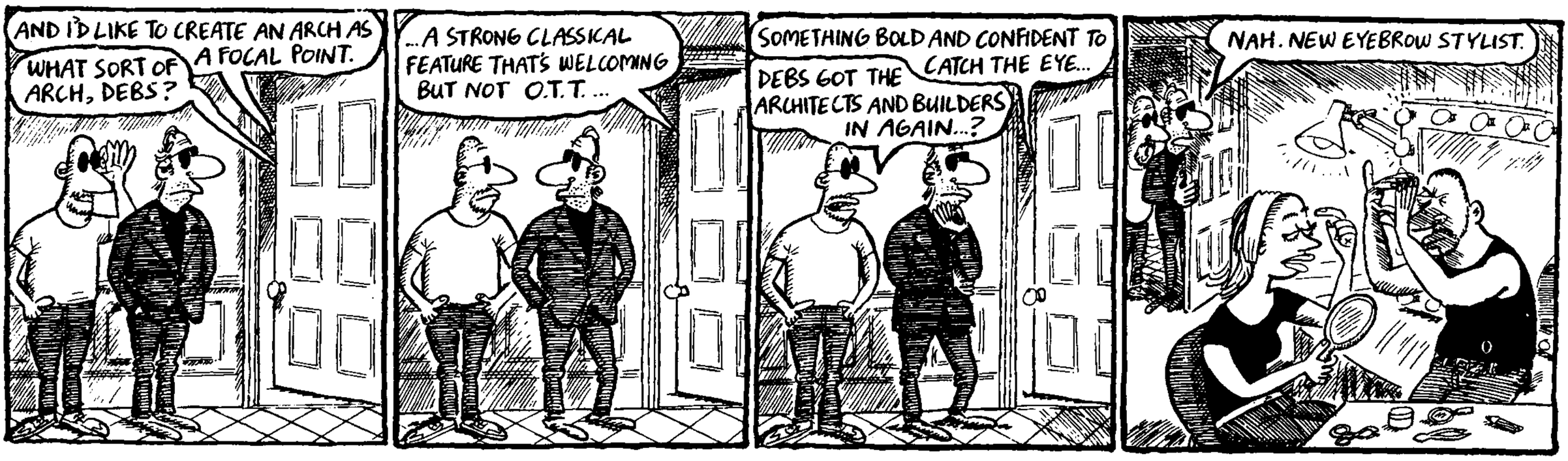
HAROLD PINTER, playwright: For sixty years the man has kicked shit. He won't take crap. If ever he sees shit, he kicks its head in. "Look here, *chum*," he says, "if your shit gets any crappier, I'm going to have to do you in." And by the way Lady Antonia fucking agrees with me, so shove that up your arse, *mate*."

ESTHER RANTZEN OBE, broadcaster, tireless campaigner: I now recognise that I was one of the first women in this, or indeed any other, country to push back the frontiers of Dylan appreciation. I twice extended a helping hand to him in the early 1970s, offering a highly-coveted temporary slot on my legendary "That's Life", filling in for the splendid Cyril Fletcher with an "Odd Ode", set to music. But, possibly through a combination of cowardice and not wishing to be outshone, Dylan failed to take up the challenge. I only hope he doesn't now blame ME for the fact that sadly his career then went into a decline, whilst mine was set to soar still higher with the award-winning *Hearts of Gold*.

NOEL GALLAGHER, rock musician: Fookin genius, he is. I like wish I could get inside the guy's head, know what I mean, and pull back the flaps and that and like look inside his brain, 'cos he's that fookin clever. He taught me that if you wanna succeed, right, you don't have to be able to sing or write songs or play or anything. Someone told me he changed his name from Zimmerman. Funny that. Imagine if he wasn't called Bob Dylan but he was still called Zimmerman Dylan, it would sound really odd. That blows my fookin mind, that does.

MARTIN AMIS, novelist and critic: "How many tarmac crashways must a pimple-nerd squelch down, Before you call him a squashed-dick, Yes, 'n' how many oceanic pus-pools must a spunk-hued flapper-rat sail before she shags out in the rock psoriasis, The answer, my friend, is farting in the swoosh-tunnel, the answer is breaking wind in the bursting air-pustules." Sure, Dylan's hip; but, like so many other saddoes, he's not quite *me*.

As told to
CRAIG BROWN


AND I'D LIKE TO CREATE AN ARCH AS A FOCAL POINT.
WHAT SORT OF ARCH, DEBS?
...A STRONG CLASSICAL FEATURE THAT'S WELCOMING BUT NOT O.T.T. ...
SOMETHING BOLD AND CONFIDENT TO CATCH THE EYE...
DEBS GOT THE ARCHITECTS AND BUILDERS IN AGAIN...?
NAH. NEW EYEBROW STYLIST.

Literary Review

Top Rankin DJ...

The Falls
Ian Rankin
(Orion, £16.99)

LIKE so many of our bright, best-selling, fortysomething novelists, back at the start of his career 15 years ago Ian Rankin aspired to some serious credibility. *The Flood* (1986), his first one, was by most definitions a "literary" novel. Its young author even turned up in the highbrow anthology *P.E.N. New Fiction II* (1987) – he was "Ian J. Rankin" then – along with Elaine Feinstein and Frances Fyfield. Then came Rebus, police procedurals and the move into genre.

Nothing wrong with serious literary credentials, of course, especially in the world of detective fiction – provided, that is, you don't fling them in the public's face. As with P.D. James and Reg Hill, Ian Rankin's general air of having read a book or two whomps up a storm with the critics.

Rebus, Detective Inspector John Rebus, whose 15th outing I estimate this to be, will be a familiar face to any student of the bug-eyed ID parades of modern cop fiction. Getting on. Lives on own. Personal life a disaster. Likes a drop. Guzzles junk food. His new, female, boss makes doctor's appointments for him which he doesn't keep, and there's a very Patricia Cornwell-style sub-text about giving up smoking.

As one might expect by this stage in the proceedings, *The Falls* – title refers to a picturesque tourist haunt, site of nefarious goings on – turns out to be a thoroughly competent and reliably entertaining yarn. The student daughter of a wealthy Scots banker disappears, leaving no trace of her whereabouts except an e-mail suggesting involvement in an internet role-playing quest game, where the player has to solve various abstruse clues before proceeding to higher levels.

Rebus can't handle the technology, natch, but while a couple of younger colleagues, Grant and Siobhan, negotiate with the "Quizmaster", he can fit the disappearance (and eventual corpse) into a chain of Scots murders and vanishments going back to the early '70s, each marked by the discovery of a tiny coffin and, occasionally, a doll.

You'll like it. I liked it, up to a point (Rebus is a touch colourless, and when he's out for a snifter the book periodically threatens to descend into a gazetteer of Edinburgh pubs). But what we have here is less a detective novel than a highly sophisticated joke about pop music. Just as Iain Banks – another bright, fortysomething, Scots laddie – stuffs his novels with incongruous musical references, so Rankin incessantly fills us in on what his characters are grooving to. However, Rankin goes one better than Banks, which is to say that, with an immense concealed cheekiness, he uses the records to assist the forward march of the plot.

We get a hint as to how things will proceed on page 27. "Rumours, Bill," Rebus murmurs about some piece of professional gossip, "Like the Fleetwood Mac album, best left unplayed." Suspicion initially falls on the victim's boyfriend. Rebus's response (p.83) is to sit in his darkling flat listening to Bob Dylan's *Desire*, which includes the track "Hurricane" ("a tale of injustice and wrongful accusation" he notes). Having visited the Falls, where a doll's coffin has turned up, he wonders about weird Bev Dodds, the local gift shop proprietress, with her row of Wiccan books, and a Rolling Stones number, "Spider and the Fly" pops into his head ("He saw Bev Dodds as a spider, her parlour a web"). One of the murders took place in 1982. Searching for some historical purchase (p.106), our man can only remember it as the year of Van Morrison's *Beautiful Vision*.

And so on, through Hawkwind, Hendrix (which Rebus plays on his car stereo to the love interest) and Brian Auger and the Oblivion Express. Not to be outdone, twentysomething Siobhan, his internet-crawling colleague, is allowed to express her own hankerings for modern stuff like Mogwai (p.164) and Mutton Birds (p.205). There are also some chortling pop jokes, such as the sudden appearance of the Mull of Kintyre on an OS map and a Dublin gardai, brought in to supply background information, called "Declan McManus" (Elvis Costello's real name, Rankin thoughtfully reveals). All jolly good fun, no doubt, but you imagine that the average corpse-sniffer who buys these things will want more for his money than these *Q* Magazine out-takes.

...and the Alice band

The Way Forward is with a Broken Heart
Alice Walker
(The Women's Press, £14.99)

CLOSING in on 60, Alice Walker stands alongside Toni Morrison as one of the two self-styled grand dames of African-American *lettres* (if you discount Oprah, on the grounds that she doesn't write *lettres*.)

Toni writes about black women in the American North. Alice has got the South covered. Between them they furnish American college students with enough references to slavery, Dr King, Langston (never use his surname), segregation and rice 'n' beans to keep those self-perpetuating theses coming. The payback is that to keep tabs on the reinvention of African-American social history, those same students have to buy Toni and Alice's books.

In case anyone doubted their gravitas, Toni has a Pulitzer to show for her 1987 novel, *Beloved*, and Alice... Well, Alice can cite a Steven Spielberg turkey, *The Color Purple*, and not a whole lot else.

It would be simple and painless to say that the reason Toni does better than Alice is because Alice can't write, and leave it at that; but blessed with some new Walker short stories we should at least prove the point.

The Way Forward Is With a Broken Heart begins with an autobiographical piece about Walker's early marriage to a white man; a marriage that eventually disintegrated, leaving her with a daughter. This reminiscence sparks off 15 other stories from narrators bearing some uncanny similarities to Walker about, among other things, black women writers and failed relationships, family, resentment and race.

Then we return to a first-person epilogue consisting of a bizarre elegy on the death of John Kennedy, a few thunderous platitudes of dubious origin to signify that the end is nigh, and a quite staggering sign-off that reads "I send you my sorrow. And my art. In the sure knowledge that our people, the American race, lovers who falter and sometimes fail, are good."

Now if such an endgame had come after 200 pages of excoriating tragedy, then it might read less as la-di-da claptrap and more as the cathartic send-off one presumes it was meant to be. But in fact this kind of highfalutin' gush is typical of the rest of the stories, whether they come direct from the mouth of Walker or from some other narrator employed to try to impart authorial distance upon what are still, obviously, Alice's big ideas.

These include such bombshells as: the history of black people in America has been a Sisyphean struggle that still continues to this day; all good things come to an end; everyone needs their freedom – be it from marriage or racial prejudice (do pay attention at the back); and that, at the end of it all, life is worth living so God Bless America.

Of course just because these are common topics doesn't devalue them: it's Walker who does that, by slapping the ishoos on so thick that the characters, with all their potential and interest, become shackled to whatever high-horse Walker is currently riding. Indeed, on the odd occasion when Alice allows incident and dialogue to speak for themselves, holds back on the abstract nouns and spares us the obviously emblematic, the whole thing begins to splutter to life. At which point Walker invariably interjects with a reminder that in her novels, the personal exists to serve the polemic.

Even this might be excusable if the agenda being shoved down our throats were slightly less simplistic; yet though Walker is anxious to inform us of her reading in Hurston, whom she has edited, she has little of the complexity of Richard Wright, nor Ralph Ellison. Alice Walker, by contrast, offers a morality that is just too black-and-white.

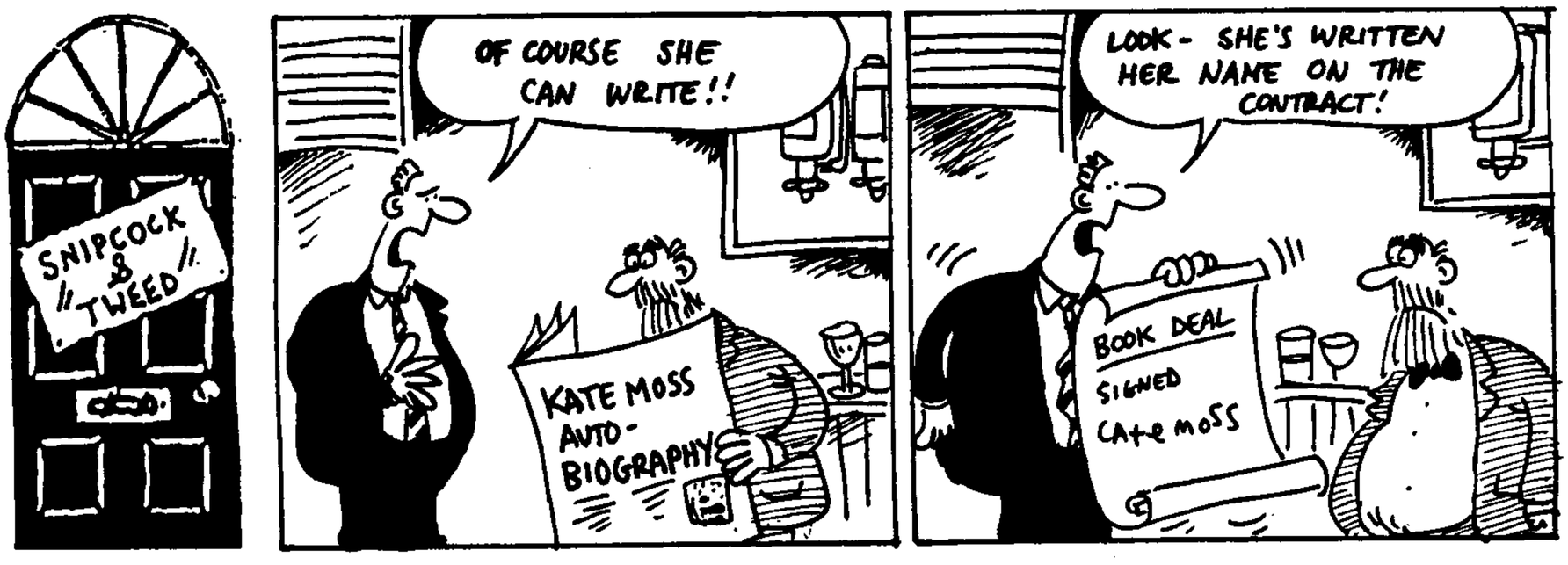
Books & Bookmen

■ FOR someone who has made his name second-guessing the markets, George Soros has had less luck predicting the tastes of book buyers. Copies of his book *The Crisis of Global Capitalism* are being given away with every purchase of a second-hand book at Hay-on-Wye Booksellers.

One customer asked why and was told: "We've got a warehouse full of them and we can't move" – thus highlighting one of the crises of book trade capitalism: backing the wrong horse.

The book was bought at Frankfurt in 1998 for a telephone number advance by Philippa Harrison and Alan Samson of Little Brown Jug. It was rush published by the end of the year because it offered a prediction of a global financial meltdown which Soros thought would happen in January 1999. Harrison said the book offered Soros the sage's "prescription" for handling the aftermath.

The disaster didn't materialise



on cue and the only dramatic meltdown was in the book's cover price (see *Eyes passim*). It now seems the example of the first edition might be followed by *Open Society – The Crisis of Global Capitalism Reconsidered*, published late last year as a belated face-saving exercise but which has shifted few units. In it, Soros admits that "in retrospect, I was wrong to predict disaster", underestimating both "the capacity of the financial authorities to prevent a disaster" and "the impact of the technological revolution". Hurrah for 20/20 hindsight. Although perhaps he will produce a reconsideration of his reconsideration if the current market crisis does lead to a meltdown after all.

■ ANOTHER disappointment for Little Brown was *Bernie's Game*, a biography of faintly sinister Formula 1 boss Bernie Ecclestone by Terry Lovell, which promised much in the way of juicy financial revelations about wee Bernie.

Unfortunately, following legal threats from Ecclestone, it failed even to make it to publication. However, it seems that it now will be published after all, having been picked up by Vision Paperbacks, a little known outfit specialising in edgy, controversial, etc, non-fiction. Will it make it onto the shelves before the election?

■ CONCERN for the *Times Literary Supplement* is growing among bookish types, although most of them can't be sure whether to feel sympathy or contempt. Why?

A recent Audit Bureau of Circulation sweep showed that no copies of the *TLS* were being sold at less than their cover price. Funny, then, that the paper should have been promoting itself vigorously in recent months with a 45 percent discount offer on subscriptions. Either no one has taken up the bargain offer – which should elicit a little sympathy for the paper's marketing department – or the *TLS* is lying through its teeth to the ABC and its own advertisers.

If the latter is the case (heaven forfend), it would not be the first time. Just last year the *TLS* was forced by the ABC to resubmit its circulation figures after editor Ferdinand Mount told the *Grauniad* in pained tones that discount copies were the only reason the *London Review of Books* outsold the *TLS*. Unfortunately, the revised submission revealed precisely how many cut-price copies were used to shore up the *TLS*'s flagging fortunes, and how much creative accounting had been going on in the circulation department at News International – where, it seems, the lesson has still not been learned.

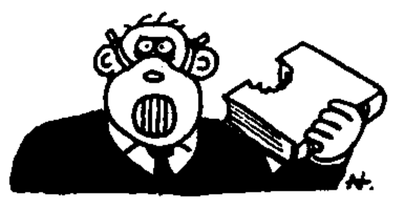
■ IS THIS a record? High-flying Editor Margaret Little recently left Orion's Cassell subsidiary. In the thirteen months that she was with the company she managed to commission 47 books.

'Bookworm'

Help! Could some kind person please offer me a one-off intensive lesson in grammer and punctuation.

Open University Magazine

Hannibal Lecteur



ON THE whole, novels which are damningly known as "genre fiction" — thriller, horror stories, SF – get short shrift on the books pages; but members of a small, fashionable elite of crowd-pleasers are always guaranteed broad coverage and a soft ride from critics happy to show how democratic and populist their tastes can be.

So, while a gruesome airport novel about aliens who propagate themselves in the human bowel, occasionally tearing out new arseholes in their hosts, would not normally detain the attention of literary editors for long, *Dreamcatcher* by Stephen King, which tells this very story, has been given priority treatment on all the right pages under the smartest by-lines.

Over a full page in the *Sunday Times*, John Sutherland solemnly considered a work in which "there is more vividly described flatulence than in any work of literature I have read since the memoirs of Le Petomane, the French virtuoso of the fart."

Matt Throne took up the cloacal theme in the *Guardian*, quoting with approval Stephen King's thoughtful description of the artistic process as "having someone crap on your head". As for the result of the latest evacuation, Thorne worked his way to the inevitable conclusion: "King retains his crown."

This reverent tone was echoed elsewhere. "King is still master of his own clichés rather than their slave," reported Charles Shaar Murray in the *Independent*. This was "King at his pulpiest, most crowd-pleasing," agreed John Williams in the *Mail on Sunday*. Daringly, Christopher Fowler, in the *Independent on Sunday*, daringly dismissed *Dreamcatcher* as a "long literary hamburger" but was given half a page in which to do so.

Another way that books pages are perked up is with inordinate attention, and skittish illustration, to any new book with a faintly risqué theme. The *Dirty Havana Trilogy*, which purports to be the sexual memoirs of a randy Cuban called Pedro Juan Guttiérrez, already appears to be this month's acceptably filthy read... "If it don't turn you on, brother, you ain't got no switches," wrote David Profumo in the reliably sex-obsessed *Literary Review*, adding the striking commendation — one for the paperback front cover, perhaps — "Guttiérrez seems to write with a quill dipped in jism".

Tim Adams of the *Observer* was less excited, admitting merely to "a kind of juvenile satisfaction in the introduction of each new woman... and a swift calculation as to how long it will take before each is fabulously and repetitively satisfied by Pedro's priapic charms."

Of course, over here bookish types offer one another more subtle forms of mutual satisfaction. Asked by the trade magazine the *Bookseller* to recommend a book to read over the Easter holidays, the publisher Michael Fishwick nominated Tim Lott's *White City Blues* on the grounds that "he writes better than almost any contemporary writer I can think of and one is simply lost in admiration." By one of those astonishing coincidences in which the book world abounds, Lott had expressed similar admiration for Fishwick's recently published first novel *Smashing People* – on its cover.

Pseuds Corner

Black Jacket

Sadness isn't sadness
it's happiness
in a black jacket

Death isn't death
it's life
that's jumped off a tall cliff

Tears are not tears
They're balls
of laughter
dipped in salt

PAUL McCARTNEY (from *Blackbird Singing: Poetry and Lyrics 1965-1999*

Cartoon *Zoran Eric* (b. 1950)
Cartoon stays as a specific philosophical model of thesis-antithesis-synthesis and sublimates the most consistent postmodern expression of Serbian music as a refined play of basic emotional cliches and rudimentary states of movement, stroke, stillness and accomplishes a supreme communicability, conciseness and clarity. Eric's philosophical attitude is, essentially, a Heraclitean view of the world as an all-imbuing scene of play from which it is constantly reborn, similar to itself, and yet new and unrepeatable. In this music, an optimal simplicity and functionality of expression is achieved, while the title and the story of the store act as a rhetorical hint with a rich metaphorical discourse. Eric does not strive towards a dialectic confrontation of antipodes, but requires interlacing, not subduing but synchrony, not classifications but witty rearrangements, not a simple mimesis but an acoustic poiesis.

Programme notes, Irish Chamber Orchestra Spring Tour 2001

When I met Damien (Hirst), ten or eleven years ago, I knew right away he was going to be the next Andy Warhol. He was dirty and sexy and rude. I said, "Hello, I'm Isabella," and he said, "Hello, you fucking cunt." So I knew something was going on.

ISABELLA BLOW
New Yorker

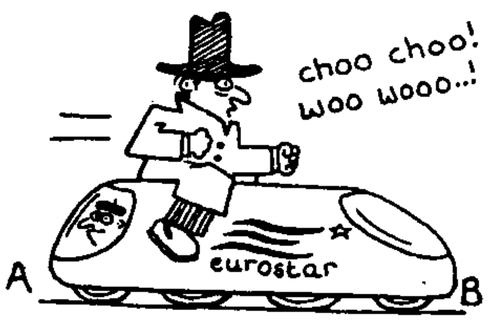
Power, Change and the Individual

The module aims to help you develop a critical understanding of the various ways in which individual subjectivity is currently conceptualised as being constructed, and to explore a variety of theoretical explanations as to the role and impact of the state in the development and fulfilment of personhood. You will also critically analyse the notion of identity as explanatory of our subjectivity, and utilise a critical understanding of the notions of agency, oppression and self-determination and conscious and unconscious motivation to understand and examine the possibility of personal change. The module's final theme is an examination of some current notions of power.

University of the West of England, Faculty of Health and Social Care prospectus

Eurostar has chosen internationally renowned actor John Malkovich to star in a new TV ad for a major new pan-European advertising campaign launching in the UK on Monday 12 March. The Eurostar ad is the first in which the actor has appeared in the UK.

The TV ad, created by Eurostar Group's recently appointed agency TBWA, forms part of an £8 million campaign, which will also include cinema, press and poster advertising in the three countries in which the high speed passenger rail service operates – the UK, France and Belgium. It is designed to deliver the message that travelling by Eurostar is about so much more than getting from A to B – it is a journey in the emotional as well as in the physical sense.



Press release

CONTRIBUTORS: J. James, Steven Devine, John Hannah, Dr Diana Terry, Anon.

£10 paid for entries

IN THE BACK

BLOOD MONEY

LAST WEEK's high court award of damages and compensation to 114 patients infected with the potentially fatal liver disease hepatitis C from contaminated blood supplies underlines the government's shameful treatment of the country's 4,800 haemophiliacs who have been living under a similar death sentence.

They do not benefit from last week's landmark ruling because they were infected by contaminated blood before the 1988 consumer legislation, under which the patients scored their court victory, came into force. The government has consistently refused them or their families any compensation.

With health ministers considering an appeal against the recent high court ruling, there is no indication of any softening of attitude. Last Friday health minister Lord Hunt offered only "sympathy" – dead handy for anyone who is sick or dying from this vicious strain of the hepatitis virus which can cause cirrhosis, liver failure and liver cancer.

More than 100 victims have already died and many more will do so in the coming years. Not only is the government refusing financial aid, it is also refusing to hold a public inquiry into how bad blood supplies went unchecked for so many years. More than 1,200 haemophiliacs were also infected with HIV, of whom 900 have already dead from Aids.

The government's refusal to hold a public inquiry perhaps has something to do with the fact that an inquiry would reveal a *continuing* scandal of greater magnitude even than BSE.

It would reveal that the risks of contaminated blood supplies have been known for well over 20 years – certainly during the crucial period that haemophiliacs were being given infected blood products. It would show that the UK ignored warnings not to import from countries like the US, which was harvesting supplies from prisoners, down and outs and drug addicts.

An inquiry would also highlight the continuing dangers of human blood products. In the last few weeks many in the stricken haemophiliac community have learned that as well as being given HIV, and hepatitis B and C from contaminated blood in the 70s and 80s, they were, in the late 90s, also exposed to new-variant CJD.

An inquiry would also highlight the fact that in England, unlike in Ireland, Wales and Scotland, the health department is still refusing to provide safe synthetic blood clotting agents to adult haemophiliacs because they are too costly.

The latest nvCJD bombshell has prompted hundreds of haemophiliacs around the country to go on a "treatment strike", believing the pain and risk from their bleeding condition is less than that posed by the diseases to which they have already been exposed — or could still be exposed — through contaminated blood.

One such victim is 34-year-old Mick Mason, who has HIV, hepatitis B and C — and who learned in January that he has also been exposed to 40 doses of nvCJD. It was the last straw. Although he risks dying from a "bleed", he is declining blood product treatment in protest. "I may as well go down fighting," he said. "They have already given me four potentially fatal diseases — what can be worse?"

In 1990 the Tory government's miserly concessions to those known to have subsequently contracted HIV were "sympathy payments" of between £20,00 and £60,000 to settle their claim for damages, with no admission of liability. As many of them then believed they had little time to live they accepted. But here lies another scandal which should be investigated. Under threat of having the financial offer withdrawn, they were also obliged to sign a waiver, saying they would not sue for hepatitis C if they eventually contracted it.

At that stage, none of them knew they had hepatitis C and they say they were told that it wasn't that serious, let alone potentially fatal.

Victims who have HIV and hepatitis C and now face the further potential threat of nvCJD are seeking to have the waivers they signed declared illegal by the courts. It is their first legal obstacle to compensation and a public airing of their case.

While Ireland, Canada and Germany have set up generous compensation schemes for sufferers and their families and launched public inquiries to discover what went wrong, English victims are increasingly sickened by the Blair government's peddling of the line that "no public interest would be served" by an inquiry.

HB SAUCE

DESPITE the obvious failure of the private firms that have won contracts to deliver housing benefit (*Eyes passim as nauseam*), the government has kept very quiet about this scandal. Is this because "new" Labour likes privatisation every bit as much as the Tories did – or because of the direct links between some of the firms and the party itself?

Last month a Benefit Fraud Inspectorate (BFI) report on Sheffield noted "weaknesses and poor standards of performance in the administration of its benefit service, leading to backlogs of work and lengthy delays in processing benefit claims". The fraudbusters pointed out that "in contracting out its benefit administration and counter fraud work the council has yet to realise the expected improvements in service delivery."

On the same day the BFI found that in Hackney the "standard of service provided to benefit claimants over the past three years has been very poor. At the time of their inspection, inspectors found significant backlogs of outstanding work which had led to substantial delays in dealing with new and renewal claims."

The BFI (unlike the *Eye*) has not named the contractors – CSL in Sheffield and ITNet in Hackney. Nor did the BFI name Capita when it pointed out late last year that Westminster "needs to improve significantly on its current performance".

Coincidentally Labour has enthusiastically embraced the firms involved. ITNet was once the computer department of Cadbury Schweppes. However, it shifted from looking after fizzy drinks to looking after the poor under its caring chairman Tory Lord Crickhowell, the former Conservative secretary of state for Wales who still sits for the party in the Lords.

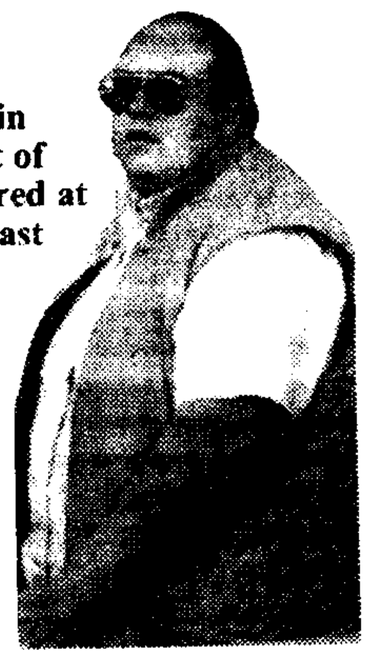
These true blue links did not put off Gordon Brown, who put ITNet chief executive Bridget Blow on to the court of the Bank of England last year. This means that the boss of a firm that has made chaos out of housing benefit (HB) delivery in Hackney and Islington has been given a key role in running Britain's economy.

CSL, meanwhile, is a subsidiary of Deloitte and Touche. In 1999 Deloitte was a "£5,000 or more" sponsor of Labour. At the last party conference senior Labourites Dawn Primarolo and Harriet Harman discussed child poverty at a fringe meeting, with free pizza, thanks to Deloitte Consulting. Child poverty caused by late benefits were not on the agenda.

For its part Capita has ensured good relations by hiring lobbying firm Lucas Lawson Mendelsohn, led by previously senior Labour officials (Ben Lucas is a former adviser to Jack Straw; Neil Lawson advised Gordon Brown; and John Mendelsohn advised Tony Blair). LLM put Clara Bentham on the Capita account: Bentham previously worked at Labours "rapid rebuttal unit" in Millbank.

CSL has also made a hash of benefits in Newham. The BFI found that while Newham had privatised to "reduce costs, improve claimant focus and improve performance", the contract "was not delivering any of these aims" and backlogs had grown. When three union stewards tried to blow the whistle on the huge piles of unopened claims, they were promptly sacked. They are waiting for an industrial tribunal. Meanwhile, CSL's slogan remains "people are our culture".

THE DAWES SHUT



BARRISTER Benjamin Nicholls was so short of material when he appeared at Worcester crown court last month to defend the fat fraudster Paul Dawes that he attacked *Private Eye* as "irresponsible".

Eye readers will recall our many articles on Dawes, who has been on the run for years, wanted by West Midlands police for a series of frauds related to car sales. His act was to pretend he was an investigator with access to cars at knock-down prices. In all he made half a million pounds from the scam.

The *Eye* article described by Mr Nicholls as "irresponsible" pointed out that while the fat man was ripping gullible people off all over the country, he was actively engaged as an informer for the West Midlands police drug squad. Earlier *Eye* articles had revealed how Dawes had ensnared former prison governor Jogen Rajcoomar in a bogus drugs supply operation that resulted in Rajcoomar's arrest, conviction and prison sentence of seven years.

Dawes had met Rajcoomar in prison where both men were serving sentences, and, after the release of both men, bombarded his prey with phone calls and meetings, all carefully supervised by West Midlands police officers, in which plans for the supply of drugs were carefully laid and tape-recorded. *All* the other people involved in that phoney drugs operation were either serving police officers or agents of the West Midlands police.

The fat man went on the run before Rajcoomar was convicted, and, in spite of overwhelming evidence of his continuing frauds and constant appeals by the West Midlands fraud squad for any information about his whereabouts, managed to avoid arrest. Eventually last December he returned to Britain from abroad and gave himself up at Gatwick airport. He pleaded guilty to a series of frauds.

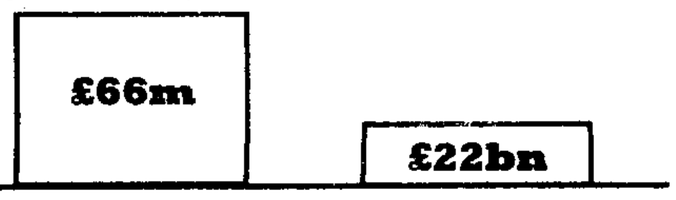
Judge John Cavell, who presided over his case at Worcester crown court, was not very impressed when Dawes's barrister handed him a copy of the *Eye* article. The article, said the barrister, was irresponsible because it might lead to his client "being exposed to unwarrantable risk in the prison system". The judge asked, pointedly: "You are not suggesting, are you, Mr Nicholls, that I should take this article into account when passing sentence?" Well, that is what Mr Nicholls probably was suggesting, but he couldn't very well admit it. In some exasperation, the judge sent the fat man to prison for five years.

Where does this leave Mr Rajcoomar? He has taken his case to the human rights courts in Europe on the grounds that he did not have a fair trial, since his involvement in the drugs operation was *entirely* set up by police agents and informers and without their participation there would have been no crime at all. The criminal cases review commission is also investigating this novel approach to combating crime.

Stock Horro

Psmart move, David

Last year, David Potter, chairman of Psion, sold one million shares in the handheld computer company



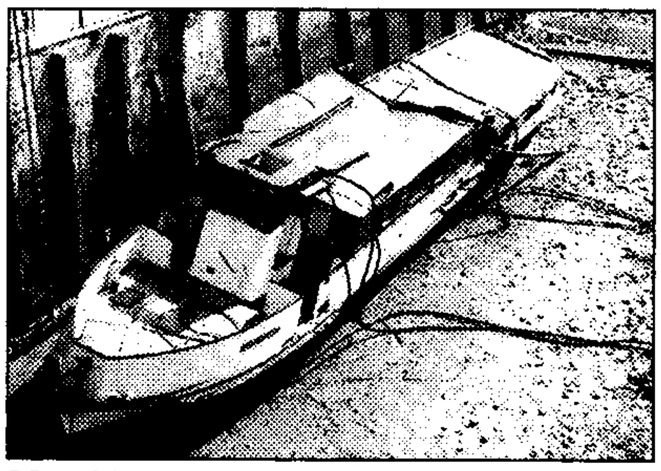
MURDER INCORPORATED?

IN 1995, six years after the Marchioness pleasure boat sank on the Thames claiming 51 young lives, an inquest jury returned a verdict of unlawful killing. Another six years on, after a long overdue inquiry, and the families finally know who was to blame for the "unlawful killing", which Lord Justice Clarke described as a "catastrophe which should never have happened". They are the skippers of the two vessels and the boats' owners.

To a lesser extent the judge also blamed the department of transport, which had predicted such a disaster but had not ensured safety measures were in place to avoid it.

John Prescott, the deputy prime minister, immediately announced that he was referring Clarke's damning report to the director of public prosecutions (DPP). But we all know that no prosecution will follow.

Douglas Henderson, the skipper of the dredger Bowbelle which ploughed into the Marchioness, has already faced two criminal trials and his right to a fair hearing suggests he is unlikely to face a third. The skipper of the Marchioness, Stephen Faldo, is dead. And as with so many disasters – the sinking of the Herald of Free Enterprise (187 dead); the King's Cross fire (31 dead); the Piper Alpha rig disaster (167 dead); the M1 air crash (41 dead), to name but a few – the real culprits are often companies and they invariably escape prosecution and conviction.



Marchioness: an avoidable catastrophe

The reason? The law governing corporate manslaughter doesn't work. It was tested when the Herald of Free Enterprise sank off Zeebrugge after her bow doors were not closed. Then the court ruled that companies do not have culpable minds and bodies and therefore, unless a court can identify an individual who is the "embodiment" or "controlling mind" of the company, a prosecution for manslaughter cannot succeed.

In practice the effect of the ruling means that only small companies with an obvious hands-on chief can be held liable for fatal disasters. Big corporations who can pass responsibility down the line are let off.

The Marchioness disaster will be no different. In criticising the pleasure boat operators, Tidal Cruises, and the owners and managers of the Bowbelle, East Coast Aggregates and South Coast Shipping (and to a lesser extent their parent company, RMC), Clarke himself stressed that the failures "are essentially systems failures". He declined requests from lawyers representing the families of the dead that he should "name and shame" individual failures.

When Prescott announced that he was referring the case to the DPP he said it was "shameful" that a formal investigation had not been ordered immediately after the disaster by the previous Tory government. He was right – though *Eye* readers may recall that RMC was then a big Tory party donor and former Tory minister Sir SNeil Macfarlane was an RMC director.

Prescott cannot continue to hide behind a previous administration's failures to bring companies to account for entirely preventable disasters and loss of life, however. The government did have on its books a corporate homicide bill which would have overcome the legal obstacles. The bill would have made companies guilty of "corporate killing" if "the management failure is the cause or one of the causes of a person's death". Specifically it states that there is an offence "if the way in which its activities are managed or organised fails to ensure the health and safety of persons employed in or affected by those activities".

That, it seems, would have caught Tidal Cruises and the two RMC subsidiaries. Clarke said East Coast Aggregates and South Coast Shipping "must bear their share of responsibility for the collision for failing properly to instruct their masters and crews and for failing thereafter to monitor them... If they had had a proper system it is much more likely than not that all their vessels would have adopted a common practice, that Captain Henderson would have done so too and that the collision would not have occurred..."

He highlighted Tidal Cruises' "failure to give proper instructions to their crews, including instructions as the keeping of an all-round look-out" and pinpointed their "failure to monitor the practices in fact adopted by their crews. If they had taken all proper steps, the collision would not have taken place."

But Labour too has big business donors now, and the party's corporate homicide bill has been delayed. It is unclear when and in what shape it might resurface. Some suggest it will be diluted and reintroduced as part of a general health and safety shake-up.

What is clear is that the failure to implement swift reform has already let many big companies off the hook – among them, it would appear, Railtrack, Balfour Beatty and other contractors responsible for the cracked rails that led to last October's Hatfield derailment in which four died and 30 were injured. With the focus for prosecution centred on middle management, no senior "controlling mind" is ever likely to be in the dock.

CHAI... AND CHAI AGAIN

LAST WEEK in the *Eye* we described the conflict between Dr Chai Patel's membership of the government's older people's task force, and his position as owner of the private healthcare firm, Westminster Health Care. We referred in particular to the Thistle Hill nursing home in Knaresborough, near Harrogate, where Westminster is closing a special unit for 22 mentally-ill elderly patients following more than a year of critical reports from the North Yorkshire health authority.

Dr Patel's sidekick, Sheila Roy, the group director of healthcare services at Westminster, took great offence at our suggestion that the company had not done enough to remedy the situation. She wrote to inform us: "It is incorrect to say that between April 2000 and the announcement of our plans to close the unit, 'little or nothing was done'. A very detailed plan for interim changes whilst the new scheme was being developed had been implemented to the satisfaction of the Health Authority."

It is funny then that a week before the *Eye* article was published, the MP for Harrogate and Knaresborough, Phil Willis, wrote to cabinet office minister Mo Mowlam asking her to reconsider Dr Patel's appointment to the older people's task force. Mr Willis painted a very different picture from the satisfied health authority described by Ms Roy. "So severe were the problems the inspection team ordered the closure of The Beech," he wrote. "Apparently Westminster Health Care had been warned on several occasions about the level of care they were giving to residents. Indeed Chai Patel had been at meetings with the inspection unit previously and had agreed to major changes. Little if anything happened."

Ms Roy also defended Westminster against the *Eye's* assertion that the sudden news of the closure has caused great distress to vulnerable residents and their relatives, as there are no other beds available in the area for patients of this kind. She wrote: "Throughout, we have done our utmost to balance the needs of each resident with the necessity to achieve a swift solution to restore the certainty they need in their lives." Once again the residents' MP had a very different take on the matter. "Quite appallingly the response from Westminster Health Care was to announce the closure initially with a 10-14 day deadline leaving vulnerable residents and their families in a state of panic," wrote Mr Willis. "As no alternative places were available locally, residents would have to be distributed all over the UK leaving families heartbroken."

ONE HULL OF A MESS

ANYONE attending the press conference staged last month by mining multinational Rio Tinto might have been gulled into thinking the company was finally moving to compensate the several hundred people who claim to have been poisoned by radioactive and toxic pollution from the company's Capper Pass tin smelter near Hull.

After years of foot-dragging and denying responsibility for the cancers and other ailments suffered by ex-workers and neighbours of the now-closed smelter, the company last year agreed to set up a claims review scheme.

It is to be established "within two to three months", and its draft rules have now been sent to MPs, the TUC, solicitors and others. The company announced that the recently-retired appeal court judge Sir Philip Otton would chair the review board, sitting with two experts.

"The scheme has been designed to be both fair and workable, and to provide a just and independent determination of claims," cooed a letter from Rio Tinto's solicitors, Linklaters, to David Russell, of Wakefield solicitors Towells, who is acting for many claimants. "We hope that you will encourage your clients to participate in it."

Just and independent? Whoops! Russell (whom Linklaters had not consulted while drawing up what was supposed to be a joint scheme between claimants and company) immediately spotted a slight problem. One of the two experts with whom Linklaters proposed the judge would sit is none other than Professor Malcolm Harrington, recently retired from Birmingham University's Institute of Occupational Health. Professor Harrington, it turns out, was a board member of the National Radiological Protection Board (NRPB) from 1992 until last year. At times he was acting chairman and even now sits on an NRPB advisory committee. The NRPB was of course the paid radiation protection adviser at Capper Pass and its performance — or lack of it — is likely to be a pivotal issue in the entire sorry saga.

However, neither Rio Tinto nor Linklaters seem able to accept that Prof Harrington's close involvement with the NRPB might disqualify him from acting as a judge in the claims review scheme — not because he would be biased, but because there might be an appearance of bias.

When Russell pointed this out to Linklaters the response was immediate and hysterical. His "highly offensive behaviour" was now "undermining the integrity of the scheme". Russell's objections were "quite frankly, insulting", foamed Linklaters. They were "clearly defamatory and an unworthy attack on a man of the highest professional standing".

Asked later whether it had been incompetence by Rio Tinto or by Linklaters which had resulted in Harrington being proposed for the scheme, Beverley Adam, the Linklaters solicitor overseeing the case, snapped: "It's no one's incompetence."

You can contact Paul Foot on 020 7287 3183 or the In the Back team on 020 7437 4017

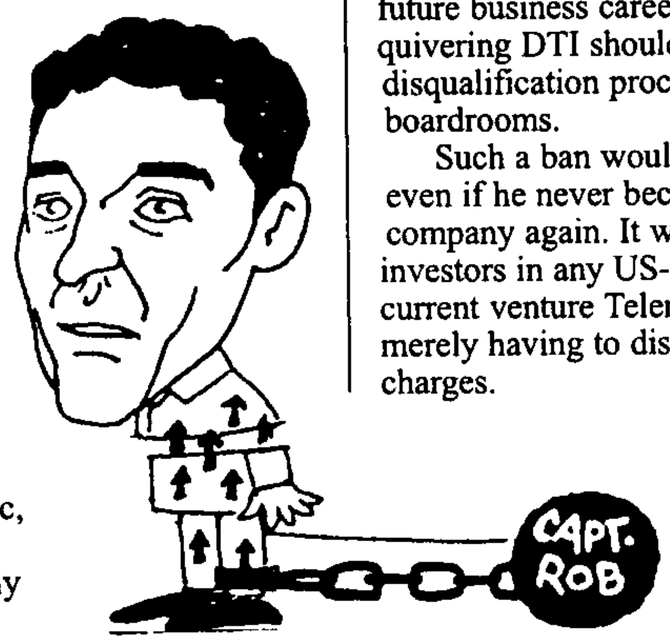
In the City

"This is an official report but it is not authoritative and it is not as complete as it purports to be."

"To the extent that we were unable to ask him all the questions we would have wished our report may be incomplete."

THOSE are the not surprising conflicting views of first Kevin Maxwell and then the judge Sir Roger Thomas and accountant Raymond Turner on their voluminous report into how the still dutiful, still excusing son helped his monstrous father Cap'n Bob pillage Mirror Group Newspapers.

The findings of the Department of Timidity & Inaction's report are so historic, so obvious and had been so extensively leaked (not entirely to Kevin Maxwell's disadvantage) that it is easy perhaps to overlook the most significant point to emerge from the 374 pages.



John Kent 1991

For a third time the conduct of Kevin Maxwell and his little helpers — such as brother Ian, Larry Trachtenberg and Michael Stoney — has been minutely examined by legal and business experts; and for a second time he has been found guilty of what amounts to criminal conduct in lying to and in other ways misleading bankers, regulators and shareholders while placing private Maxwell interests above those of MGN and pensioners.

The previous guilty verdict was pronounced by high court judge Mr Justice Millett in 1993 when he described Kevin Maxwell as an "accomplished liar" who had "lied to many different people on many occasions". Millett was ruling on the events surrounding the fraudulent pledging of shares in Berlitz to the pressing bankers of the Maxwell private companies that belonged to the public company Maxwell Communication Corporation.

Kevin Maxwell's explanation, said Millett in a withering condemnation, was "a modern and sophisticated version of the excuse of every office boy who ever put the firm's petty cash on a certain winner in the Derby". Except that it involved almost £100m; Kevin Maxwell was no office boy but the second most important director at MCC and the Berlitz; and similar transactions helped to cause MCC's collapse.

Fortunately for Kevin Maxwell, the only time he faced a criminal charge for this same conduct he was acquitted by a jury of non-City experts too ready to sympathise with the burden of his dominating father; a defence which encouraged the jury to blame everyone other than the defendants; a prosecution too witless and clumsy to illuminate the truth; and a judge who wrongly believed that letting the jury only see the heinous defrauding of the pension funds, but not the regular defrauding of the banks, would not obscure the full criminality and responsibility for an undoubted £450m crime for which there are countless victims but nobody has been convicted.

The DTI inspectors clearly felt constrained by the convention that juries cannot be accused of getting things wrong and jury verdicts cannot be challenged (not strictly true). Kevin Maxwell escaped a second trial on the Berlitz share deal precisely because it was considered the jury had already spoken on the issue of his dishonesty. The Serious Farce Office had been asked to hit Maxwell with its best shot and failed to put him down.

With MGN the inspectors admit that they, like their predecessors in Guinness who also produced a much delayed and largely sanitized rerun of known information, cannot ignore the jury verdicts — however much they might have disagreed, which makes such reports all but worthless. So there is no condemnation of Kevin & Friends similar to that made of Robert Maxwell in the 1971 DTI report into Pergamon Press. No recommendation for further DTI action.

So that left Kevin Maxwell to do the rounds of the Sunday newspapers dispensing "exclusive" interviews in which — just as his father totally rejected all the Pergamon findings — so the MGN report was rejected as not "authoritative". His father had been unfairly demonised. "He did not operate in a vacuum". There were directors and advisers. All the City is to blame, not one man and his son. That's the Kevin Maxwell version. Like father like son.

This way Maxwell junior can both protect his future business career and signal his intentions to the quivering DTI should it have the courage to start disqualification proceedings to ban him from British boardrooms.

Such a ban would greatly handicap Maxwell even if he never became the director of a British company again. It would have to be revealed to investors in any US-listed company, such as his current venture Telemonde, instead of, as now, merely having to disclose his acquittal on fraud charges.

But the DTI has never been renowned for its courage. It flunked the challenge when Cap'n Bob was alive and his steely son is unlikely to be any easier an opponent. So even without his Maxwellian bombast about human rights, do not be surprised if the DTI find all sorts of reasons —all too long ago; too costly; report punishment enough, etc — not to disqualify Kevin Maxwell for the "heavy responsibility" he bears for his "inexcusable" behaviour towards the *Mirror* shareholders and pensioners which allowed their assets to be stolen.

After all, trade secretary Stephen Byers has had the report since 5 March — long enough to know what he wants to do if there was a clear wish to do the right thing.

AT THE heart of what happened with Robert Maxwell was the refusal of all but a handful of City figures and commentators to accept that the Bouncing Czech was still the man discredited over Pergamon as not being "a person who can be relied on to exercise proper stewardship of a publicly quoted company".

"Many of the banks and other professionals thought that, because Robert Maxwell had been successful, he had changed and that the well known conclusion of the 1971/73 DTI reports were no longer applicable," declared the MGN inspectors. "We have no evidence which showed that he had changed his spots as regards his stewardship of a public company... There was moreover no objective evidence on which anyone should have been justified in acting towards Robert Maxwell and his companies without a high degree of circumspection and care".

So how did Maxwell manage to fool so many supposedly smart City suits? The answer is that he didn't. Bankers, brokers, accountants, lawyers from the City's top draw chose to believe Maxwell was not a crook because it paid them very well to do so.

Even after all the fines and settlements, most of those who helped rehabilitate the pension pillager still came out well ahead.

As the MGN report makes clear, those who dealt with Maxwell and his son soon discovered the way to fat fees. Do whatever they want, don't ask questions, don't rock the boat. The fall guys could always be National Westminster, which had ushered Maxwell back into the City fold after he saved them from a £17m loss at British Printing. NatWest never said a bad word about Cap'n Bob.

Then there were the auditors Coopers & Lybrand Deloitte who saw their role as doing whatever window dressing and creative accounting was required, ignoring the lessons of Chalmers Impey in Pergamon who also swallowed doubts and made the numbers add up the way Maxwell wanted.

There was also the long list of the supposed great and good who graced Maxwell boardrooms as well paid dogs who never barked never mind bit. Men like Robert Clark, Alan Clements, Lord Charles Williams, Lord Bernard Donoughue. And those such as Lord Peter Walker and Sir Michael Richardson who knew Maxwell from way back but were prepared to suffer from convenient amnesia as long as the money was right.

Many financial journalists who knew the truth about Maxwell also connived at his second coming, despite what had been written about Pergamon and before. Not of course that you would know that from reading the caustic comments on the MGN report blaming everyone else.

With the relentless exception of *Private Eye* and occasional attacks mounted by the Financial Times, the *Independent* and the *Daily Mail*, the rest of Fleet Street was only too happy to welcome Maxwell back and, when he went over the side, to lend support to his sons — until the reason for his fatal mid-ocean dip became clear.

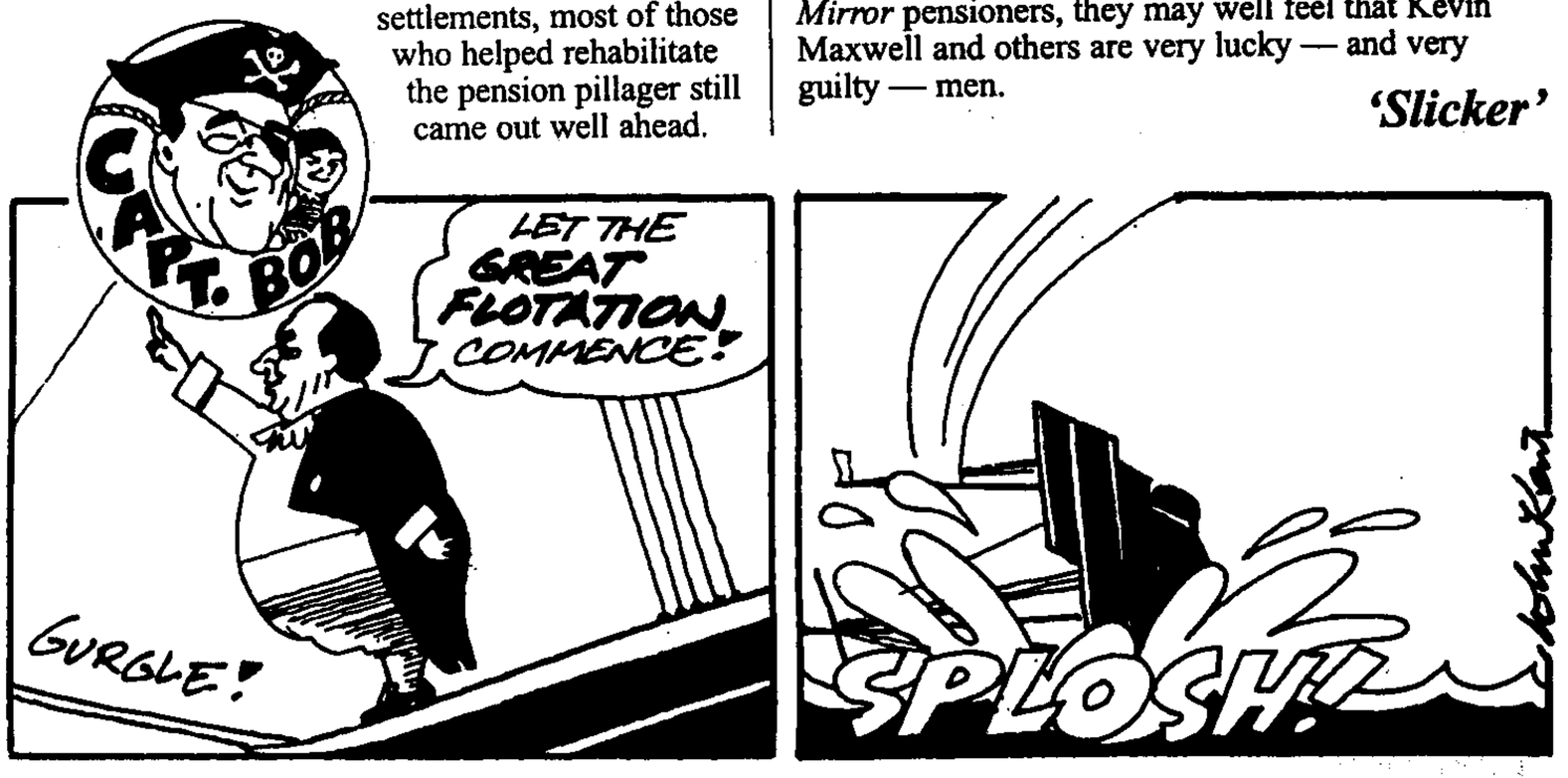
The City pages of the *Daily* and *Sunday Telegraph* in particular were fawning under Ivan Fallon and John Jay, who retained some of that sympathy at the *Sunday Times* despite the honourable role the paper's Insight team had played in first exposing Maxwell long before the DTI investigated Pergamon. The *Guardian*, the *Times* and the Economist were others with a blind eye to the past. Other newspapers often took the line of least resistance to avoid the automatic threat of legal action .

Once again history is repeating itself. Those same Sundays cosy up to Kevin seeking an "exclusive" rather than treating him as the pariah he should be. His father conned many journalists into believing the lie that he had been exonerated from the Pergamon verdict. So now the newspapers rush to blame the DTI for its failure to produce its verdict on MGN until almost ten years after the fat crook drowned.

Yet the delay is all down to one man — Kevin Maxwell. "We would have finished our report in 1997 had we been able to obtain Kevin Maxwell's evidence at that time," say the inspectors, who had largely completed their investigation in 1995 as the trial began.

"I don't believe that the public doubt that verdict", declared a relieved Kevin Maxwell after a second trial was stopped later in 1996 leaving his acquittal to stand. Well, those who read between the lines of the judgments of Mr Justice Millett and the DTI inspectors may chose to disagree. Like the *Mirror* pensioners, they may well feel that Kevin Maxwell and others are very lucky — and very guilty — men.

'Slicker'



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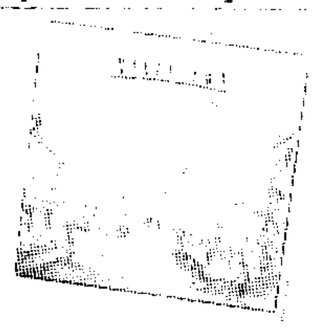

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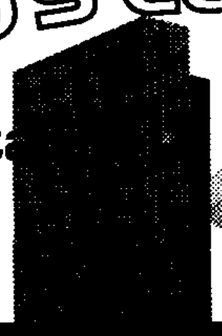

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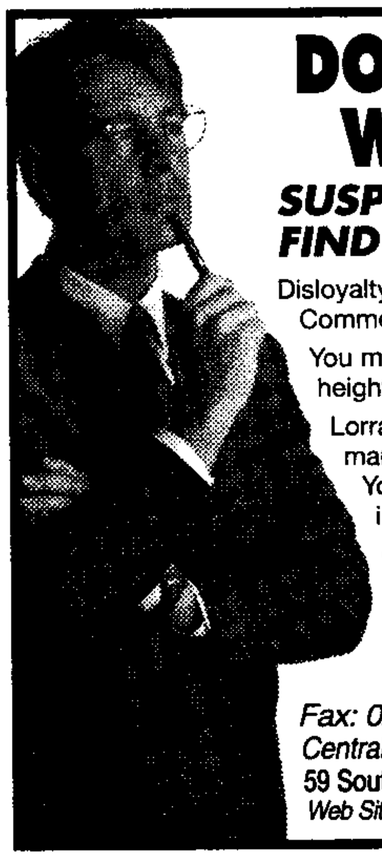

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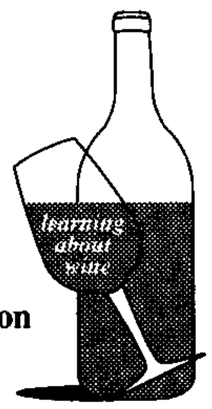

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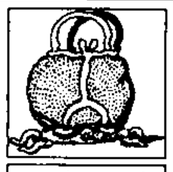

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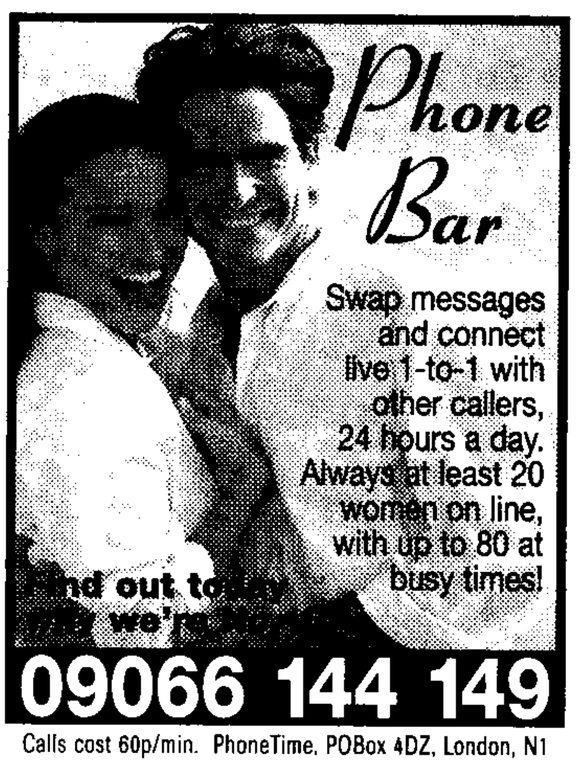

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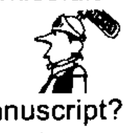

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